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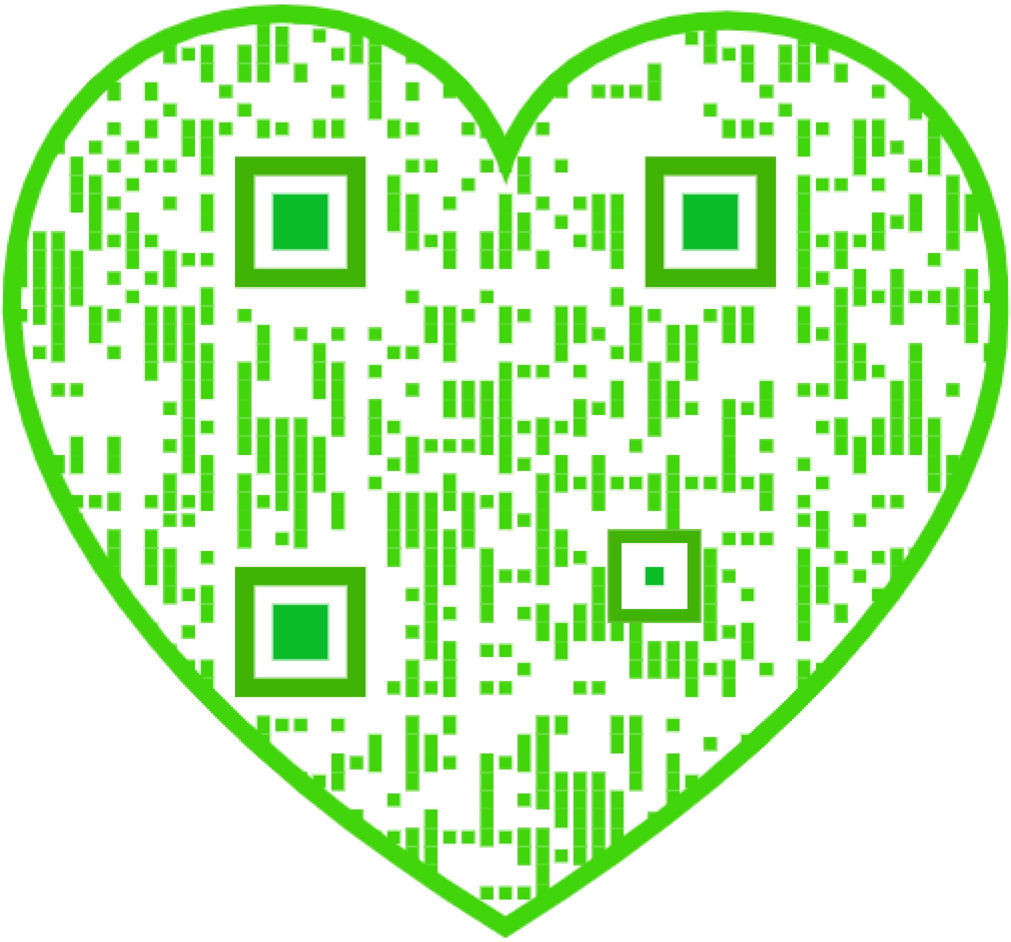

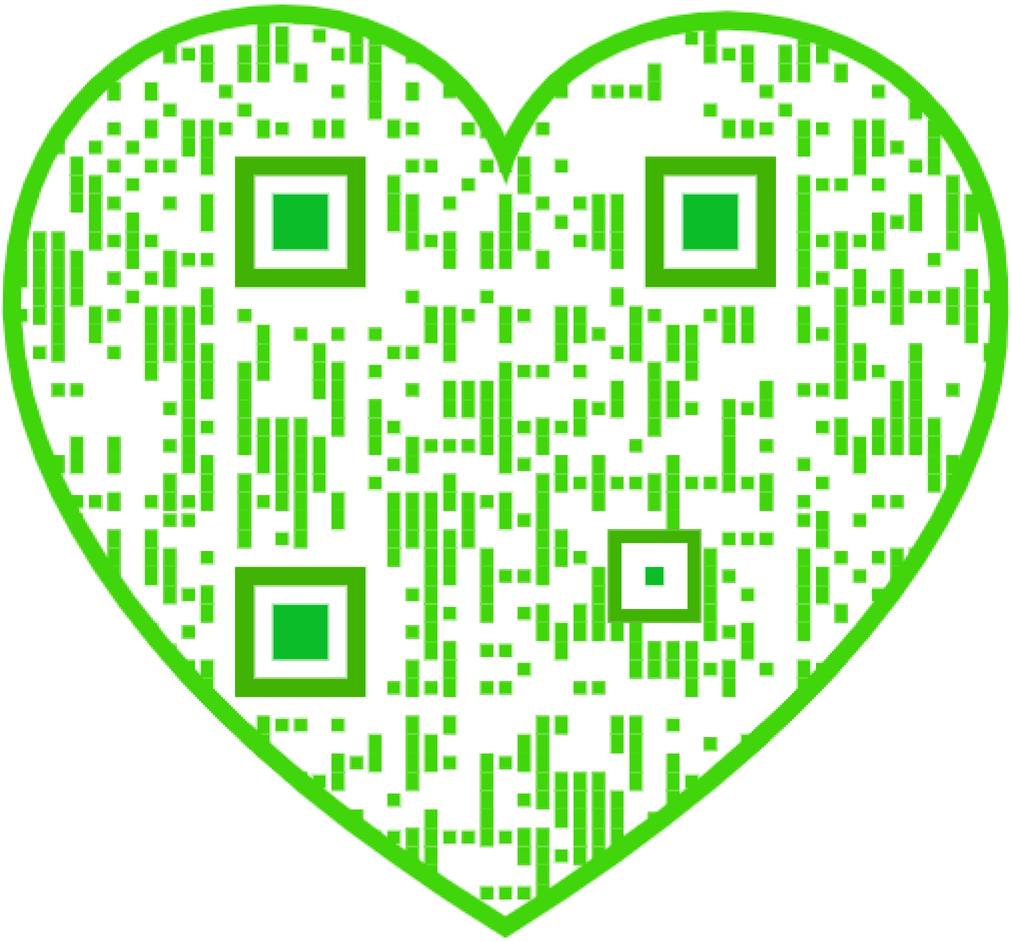

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# WILL McLAREN SUCCEED WHERE ASTON STRUGGLES?

The bombshell news that McLaren Automotive and tech-savvy British luxury start-up Forseven are joining forces to create a greatly expanded car-making operation is fantastic for a pressurised specialist industry and a country that wants to thrive on high-tech enterprise (see p4). Forseven has been secretive until now but we already know its talent pool is seriously impressive.

But do you remember when McLaren said it would never make an SUV? The inference was that this would be a boring product direction. Today, it's quite a mind-stretcher to imagine how a McLaren off-roader might look. Perhaps the company and its Middle Eastern backers might even be encouraged to get into luxury limousines. (Move over, Bentley.)

Amid all this, how must beleaguered Aston Martin feel as it struggles for profitability while building market-leading cars? British companies constantly prove they can make wonderful cars, but financial viability remains the holy grail and the UK's finest sports car firms have lagged behind Ferrari on that.

So while New McLaren's next era will be endlessly exciting – perhaps as exciting as the McLaren F1 (p84) that started it all in the creative, go-ahead 1990s we also celebrate in this issue (p42) – the way McLaren sells its cars, and who it targets as buyers, will present the biggest challenge of all.

**Rachel Burgess, magazine editor**
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

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Not Oasis versus Blur. Sit back and listen to the nostalgic sounds of some proper 1990s machinery being given a workout.

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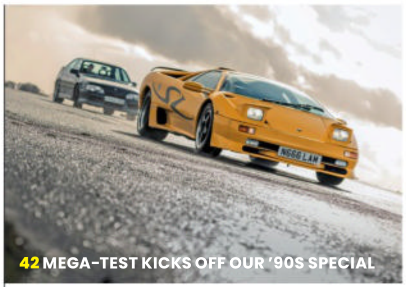

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# McLAREN UNLEASHED BY SHOCK MERGER DEAL

## Merger with UK start-up Forseven will transform McLaren's future line-up way beyond sports cars

McLaren Automotive is to merge with British start-up Forseven in a bombshell move that will enable it to expand beyond making mid-engined supercars for the first time.

The merger secures the future of McLaren, giving it the capital, technology and resources to go into areas of the market that it hasn't been able to finance itself.

Forseven has been quietly assembling a team of more than 700 industry professionals, among them big-name designers, engineers and executives from other British car firms, and has been building towards the launch of a range of luxury models under a new brand.

The common link here is the Abu Dhabi government-backed investment company CYVN Holdings, which has facilitated a merger operating under the McLaren Automotive name that will enable the models in development at Forseven to come to market under the McLaren badge.

This gives Forseven a shortcut to market and gives McLaren the expansion and security it craves and the ability to better compete with the likes of Ferrari, Lamborghini, Aston Martin and Bentley.

The official announcement confirms an autocar.co.uk story from February, which reported that a merger was being planned between McLaren Automotive and Forseven to enable McLaren to expand beyond its supercar range.

The new combined firm, McLaren Group Holdings, will be led by Forseven CEO Nick Collins, who – in his only interview with an automotive title – told Autocar: "We're about to embark on the most exciting British automotive story in decades."

Collins was previously a senior engineer at Ford and latterly JLR, where he oversaw the likes of the Land Rover Defender and Range Rover.

The Forseven name had never been intended as a customer-facing one and will cease to exist.

"It's just a holding name, and we've been building at an incredible pace," said Collins, who became Forseven CEO in early 2024.

The first official details of the new-era McLarens will be revealed later this year and Collins promised "a bigger-bang event" that goes beyond this initial corporate announcement.

In the meantime, the company says work will "commence immediately" on a six-month turnaround

"It gives McLaren Automotive the expansion and security it craves"

McLaren
AUTOCAR IMAGE

of the existing McLaren Automotive business.

Collins declined to give specific details about any of the models planned but confirmed they are a range of cars in the luxury market at higher price points, which would make for a broader portfolio of McLarens than exists today.

Our artist's renderings accompanying this story imagine what some of those cars might look like.

"It's not as challenging as you think to explore how the design language of this brand [McLaren] could evolve in the future and still maintain everything that they've already done and a lot more," said Collins.

Design work is being overseen by Alister Whelan, also formerly of JLR. Before Collins arrived at Forseven in January 2024, design models and feasibility studies for models had been created but he said: "We have evolved a long way since then."

The design team comprises around 50 people, and Collins said ▸

Merger will give McLaren a line-up to directly rival Ferrari and Aston Martin

◂ their output has been "staggering" over the past 12 months. There are operations based in the UK and Australia and virtual reality has been used alongside physical models to allow design work to take place 24/7.

"They're really looking into the fundamental building blocks of British design," he said. "There are some amazingly consistent elements of British design, and particularly British luxury design, that permeate British brands. We've taken that, plus some McLaren influence, into where we're going to go."

Prior to the McLaren deal, it was Forseven's intention to go to market with its own brand, and it had been working on different brands and names.

Intriguingly, the models that have been in creation at Forseven aren't solely electric (an easy assumption to make, given its website URL is forseven-ev.com) and McLaren's expansion into other segments will include high-performance internal combustion engines.

Collins said: "The future of propulsion is multi-propulsion. The more luxurious the vehicle gets, the better electric is for it, because it's quieter, more refined. So it will play a role.

"We genuinely think you can make a brilliant electric car in certain segments, but through the way the world is transitioning at different paces in different parts of the world, we will have different propulsion technologies to allow us to grow in the right way."

Selected Nio tech will be used on future McLarens but not a full architecture

To date, McLaren has been limited to mid-engined supercars

Another CYVN investment is in Chinese EV maker Nio. Collins said a technology licence exists between Forseven and Nio "that we have incorporated into the cars" but it's for specific "technology chunks", rather than for an architecture on which to base the cars, because buying in architectures is "the graveyard of car projects".

Collins said: "We will be deploying [the technology] in a very unique way that's specific to what we're trying to achieve. Think of it as an accelerator to what we do."

Based on that description, examples of the technology that McLaren could use for future cars include its autonomous driving features and its EV battery-swapping systems.

And when it comes to architectures, McLaren's experience in composites is likely to come into play.

Since 2023, CYVN has also owned Gordon Murray Technologies (GMT). This includes the rights to the iStream manufacturing process, which is more cost-effective than traditional manufacturing and allows for lighter vehicle weight.

Collins said "the spirit" of the process will be used for production in the future and "research projects are ongoing" to that end.

Vehicle development is a huge part of what GMT does, and its engineers are sure to be playing a leading role in developing this new era of McLarens.

Collins said Forseven is looking at the evolution of luxury brands in other markets – for example, Louis Vuitton moving into selling trainers – as a way of broadening and redefining the types of cars that companies like McLaren can make and sell.

To that end, Forseven is "trying to think a bit more luxury than automotive in exploring what we do".

Collins added: "We have to overcome that British reserve: why can't you do that?

Ex-JLR exec Collins will become head of merged organisation

Automotive wisdom might say you can't do this at this time, but luxury wisdom in adjacent segments would say you can.

"The first thing we could do is fail to try. We're not going to be reckless or stupid, but expect us to be a little bit unconventional in how we do it."

Indeed, Collins hinted that Forseven could even look to revive vehicle types from the past. He cited the Defender 90 as an example, saying it outwardly seemed that "the three-door car market was dead" but "if you get the car right, then it will recreate a market or generate a market".

Collins added: "If you get the cars right, you will distort the market, because you will drag people from other luxury brands or drag people up who will do whatever they can to get the car, and you will create success through that.

"I fundamentally believe success comes from great products, and if you don't have great products, it doesn't matter what you write down as your ambition as it's not going to happen."

Collins promised cutting-edge technology for the new McLarens and said that will "play a huge role" in everything the brand does, including in the hardware and software underpinning its cars.

"Whether it's a direct or indirect relationship, technology plays a role," he said. "It might be manufacturing technology in terms of how you build the car that gives it a certain weight level [iStream]. It might be technology that gives it performance, quietness, connectivity or active safety. People buy a package.

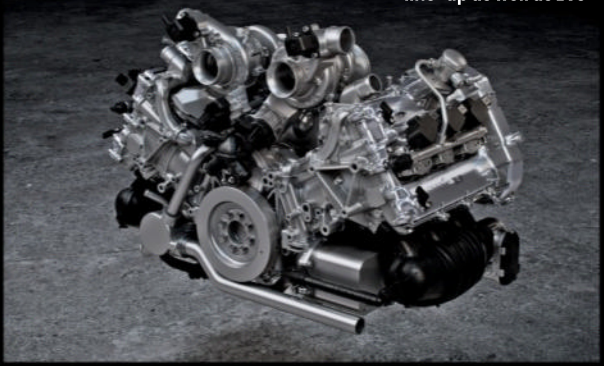
"I also believe when you enter segments that you've not been in before, brand advantage is good. Design advantage is good. Everything else we underpin with technology."

More broadly, on the new company and the emergence of CYVN in the automotive industry, Collins said: "This is not a vanity project. This is a financial investment that we will build out and, in my mind, become one of the best, if not the best car company in the world. That might take a very long time, but the people that back this have a long-term horizon for a sustainably profitable business that is admired around the world.

"I'm sure there will be plenty of people out there throwing rocks at it and saying it can't be done and such and such can't happen. But I really want this to be something that Britain can become very proud of."

**MARK TISSHAW**

Petrol will continue to feature in McLaren's line-up as well as EVs



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**"We're not going to be reckless, but expect us to be a little unconventional"**

# McLAREN–FORSEVEN MERGER: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

## We unpick what it means, how it will work and what will happen next

Woking Technology Centre will remain the McLaren supercar base

**What is CYVN Holdings?**
CYVN is an investment arm of the Abu Dhabi state (part of the UAE) with what Forseven CEO Nick Collins calls "a remit to invest in advanced mobility".

It formed Forseven as an anchor investment in 2022 and has expanded its automotive portfolio since.

It paid $2.2 billion (£1.7bn) for a 20% stake in Chinese electric car company Nio in late 2023 and Collins sits on the Nio board as part of its stakeholding.

It bought Gordon Murray Technologies in 2023 and also acquired the rights to GMT's innovative iStream production process as part of that deal.

CYVN acquired McLaren Automotive in December 2024 and it was Collins, who also acts as an automotive advisor to CYVN, who first suggested around a year ago that it looked at the Woking-based supercar maker to help realise Forseven's ambitions. The merger was always the aim and has been formally in the works since then.

CYVN took a non-controlling stake in McLaren Racing as part of that deal.

Future models will wear a McLaren badge rather than a new one

**What is the structure of the new company?**
The new combined company – including McLaren Automotive, Forseven, the newly formed McLaren Licensing business and CYVN's non-controlling stake in McLaren Racing – is officially named McLaren Group Holdings Ltd, and Collins will be its CEO.

The company's chairman is Jassem Mohamed Bu Ataba Al Zaabi, who is also the head of several other organisations, including the Abu Dhabi Retirement Pensions and Benefits Fund, the Emirates Telecommunications Group and the Abu Dhabi Department of Finance.

In a statement, he said: "I'm personally committed to making this vision a reality. It isn't just about investing: it is about shaping the future of McLaren as a brand, as a business and its place on the global automotive map."

**Where will McLaren be based?**
Bicester, Oxfordshire - a location that Collins favours as a central hub between the Midlands and London and the south-east, allowing it to attract from a wider talent pool.

Forseven has three units, including a new design centre, opening there soon.

It also has offices in Shalford, Surrey – where the GMT operation is currently run; and Leamington Spa, Warwickshire – unsurprisingly, given the volume of talent it has attracted from JLR.

All of McLaren's facilities at Woking, along with its composites factory near Sheffield, will be retained and the companies will be integrated together rather than run separately.

Collins said the new company will "probably look to rationalise our footprint over time" but will retain all its facilities.

Collins declined to confirm where the Forseven-derived McLarens will be built but did rule out China as one option.

**How many cars will McLaren make?**
Collins said that rather than judging McLaren's ambitions by volume, he would "much rather think about value and where we can generate value with this brand and this portfolio of cars".

McLaren itself sold just over 2000 supercars last year and, based on the way companies such as Ferrari and Lamborghini have taken their sales beyond 10,000 with additional model lines, this could be a long-term figure that Forseven strives to attain.

The 7000 annual sales figure that Aston Martin is targeting would be a more likely number to pass in the medium term for McLaren.

McLaren now has rights to Murray's iStream method

**What will happen to Forseven as we know it today?**
In fairly short order, it will cease to exist and McLaren is the name by which it will be known.

Collins said that creating and building a new brand was the biggest risk facing Forseven in going to market and what it saw in McLaren was "an incredible opportunity to actually adapt what we were doing to build out something that has incredible potential".

**What will happen to the existing McLaren team and leadership?**
The McLaren Group has around 3500 staff, including the racing team, and the number working across the Automotive division that CYVN has acquired is around 2500.

Collins has promised a full integration of the two companies so that

Production will rise as more models appear but there's no volume target

## "The two companies will now operate as one"

they will operate as one. He acknowledged that "change is always difficult" and said the two companies have spent a lot of time already "looking at where we are similar and where we are different".

Asked what would happen to incumbent McLaren Automotive CEO Michael Leiters, Collins said he would not comment on specific roles but added that he and Leiters had noted that the two companies' leadership teams had "got on extremely well, extremely quickly".

**Will there be job cuts?**
While the intention is to ultimately grow McLaren's size, Collins said it's "too early to say" if there will be job cuts due to overlap following the merger.

"What I've said to everybody [at McLaren] is that we've got to improve short-term performance. That's clear," he said. "And, frankly, at Forseven we can improve things on efficiency and how we're allocating resources for what we're getting done as well."

**Is the expansion of Lotus a fair comparison for the Forseven-McLaren plans?**
On the face of it, it seems similar: sports car maker gets taken over and then starts to make other vehicle types. But Forseven and McLaren will be integrated as one company in one country, whereas Lotus effectively operates as two companies: a sports car maker in Norfolk and a 'lifestyle' EV maker in China. Very little DNA is shared between those two arms either. Forseven is promising something very different.

**Who else is involved at Forseven?**
The Forseven team is made up of more than 700 individuals (and it works with more than that number again through external partners), largely recruited from other car makers. Its workforce has grown from around 250 people at the start of 2024.

Approximately half of the 700 work in R&D.

Alister Whelan, formerly of JLR and an ex-colleague of Collins, heads up the design team.

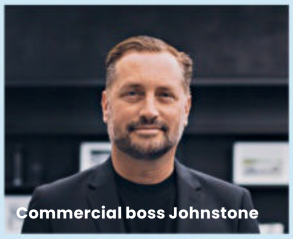
Other prominent team members include Mike Johnstone and Conor Horne, both formerly senior Lotus executives, who are commercial director and director of commercial readiness at Forseven respectively.

Intriguingly, former McLaren CEO Mike Flewitt had been working with Forseven and GMT for the past year but, according to his LinkedIn profile, he left that role in February.

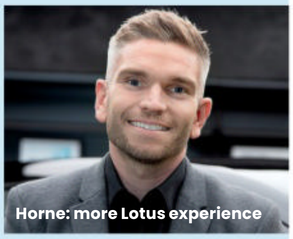
**How will the company link to the McLaren Formula 1 team?**
Perhaps more than now. CYVN's McLaren Automotive deal included a non-controlling stake in the McLaren Racing arm, whose F1 team is the reigning champion.

"The racing team is doing a phenomenal job at the moment so the global awareness of the brand is incredible," said Collins. "I want to get the awareness of the automotive part of the business to the same scale and value as the racing part – but that's not about hitting a headline volume."

**MARK TISSHAW**


Commercial boss Johnstone

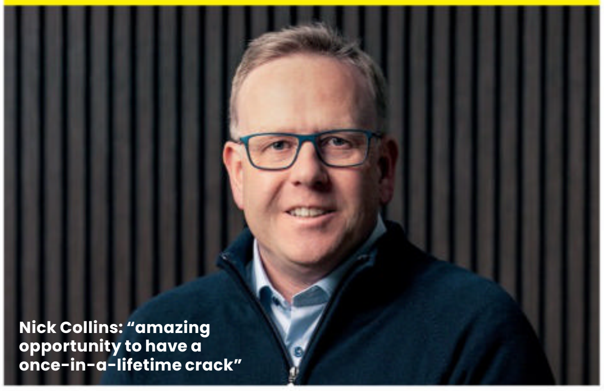
Design chief Whelan is ex-JLR


Horne: more Lotus experience

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONS
Link between McLaren's road cars and F1 race team may intensify

## Grapevine

**MARK TISSHAW**


Nick Collins: "amazing opportunity to have a once-in-a-lifetime crack"

TEN MINUTES AND 26 seconds into our conversation, the bombshell drops: "What I can say now is that we will merge Forseven and McLaren. It will all exist under a McLaren umbrella."

We had speculated as much in our reporting of Forseven previously, but to hear the words come out of the mouth of Forseven CEO Nick Collins made for quite a jaw-dropping moment. Wow, this is big!

Collins had been one of the faces of JLR over the past decade but he had joined the previously almost mythical Forseven 15 months ago and disappeared from public view. He has made quite the return.

Forseven had been operating differently from most start-ups in being almost entirely secretive. Its only visible presence has been a holding webpage and the LinkedIn profiles of its ever-increasing staff listing it as their employer.

Most start-ups are noisy, building hype and therefore trying to attract investment. Forseven didn't need to do that. It's entirely funded by an investment arm of the Abu Dhabi state, McLaren effectively becoming the Manchester City of the car world. It means business – and the acquisition and now turbocharging of McLaren Automotive is a quite stunning development.

"We didn't need to go big and bold and say 'come fund us'," says Collins. "Our backers were already in place." Indeed, as becomes clear during our conversation, Collins isn't understating things when he says: "We are much further down the line than most people think we are."

Collins was attracted by the scale of the ambition at CYVN Holdings and left a board role at JLR. But having "always wanted to be the CEO of something", it was a chance to not only do that but also "build a legacy" in the process.

"As reserved Brits, we get shy of being ambitious," he says. "I genuinely felt we had the right ingredients coming together. That, while everybody else is hunkering down, gave us an opportunity to be aggressive going forwards.

"This is an amazing opportunity to have a once-in-a-lifetime crack with some talented people to leave something for generations to come."

He mentions on a few occasions that CYVN "makes decisions faster than I've ever seen in any business". While CYVN provides stability, financial or otherwise, that decisiveness allows for great flexibility, typified by Forseven's go-to-market strategy being as ballsy as to merge with McLaren.

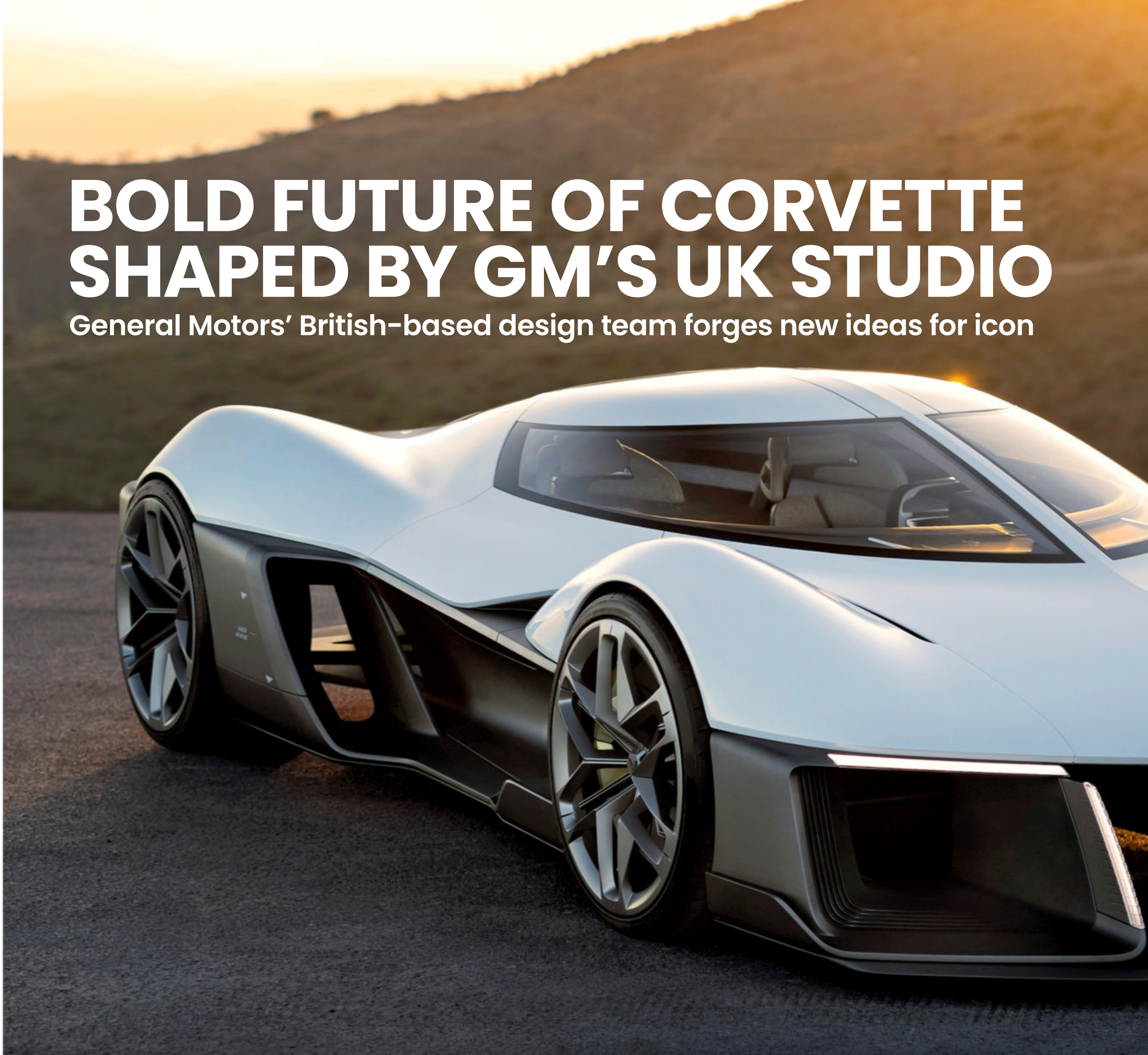
> **"We're much further down the line than most people think we are"**

Collins also speaks highly of the culture at Forseven and claims that good culture creates good cars, saying the "cars that have been awful pretty much universally had a bad team".

He's raring to kick-start this new era for the great name of McLaren, and while Forseven has no history of its own, it does have a link to Bruce McLaren himself, for what was the founder's favourite racing number? 47.

# BOLD FUTURE OF CORVETTE SHAPED BY GM'S UK STUDIO

## General Motors' British-based design team forges new ideas for icon



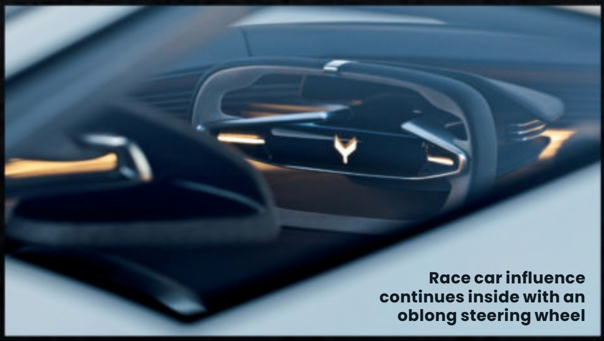
General Motors has unveiled a fully finished, future-looking Chevrolet Corvette EV concept produced entirely in Britain, to underscore the importance of its large and impressive new UK advanced design studio.

The recently opened studio in Leamington Spa is led by Julian Thomson, previously Jaguar's head of design. Thomson has also worked for other manufacturers including Volkswagen and Lotus and was responsible for the creation of design icons such as the original Lotus Elise and the Range Rover Evoque.

The opening of a new design outpost comes as part of a push by GM to re-establish itself in Europe following a decade-long absence. GM-owned Cadillac's new Lyriq EV is already available in certain markets in the region and the smaller, Europe-focused Optiq crossover is due to follow in the coming months – and both are due in the UK eventually.

The new Chevrolet concept is the first of three studies from GM studios to be shown this year as part of a global Corvette design project. The UK-designed concept is intended to contribute ideas and influence a single, final show car that will be unveiled in the second half of this year, possibly at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in July.

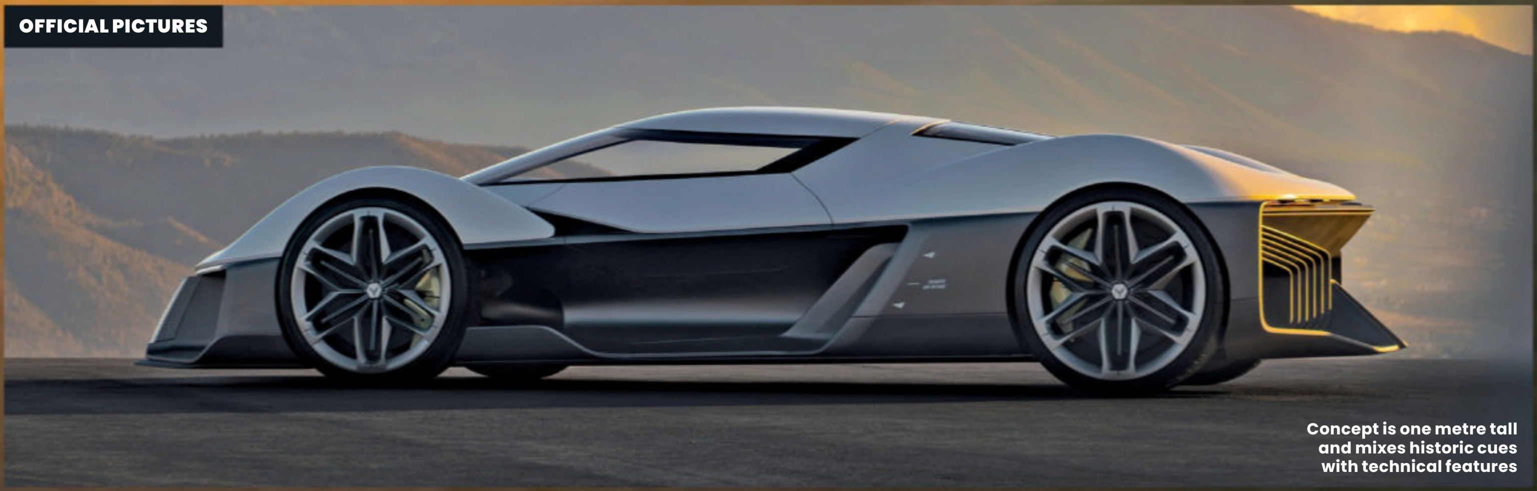
That design will then inform the development of a replacement for the current Corvette C8, expected around 2028, though at this stage GM isn't confirming that the Corvette C9 will be a pure-electric car.



Race car influence continues inside with an oblong steering wheel

Company sources also say that while there is no production intent for the UK design – or the other two concepts, both from US studios – the new 30-strong British team was specially tasked with using its fresh perspective to "completely rethink the Corvette nameplate, pushing the boundaries of design and technology".

GM senior vice-president of global design Michael Simcoe, who was in the UK for the opening of the Leamington studio, says the British advanced design team's mandate extends well beyond creating production vehicles. It is "primarily tasked with imagining what mobility could look like five, 10 and even 20 years into the future and with driving innovation for GM", said Simcoe.



Concept is one metre tall and mixes historic cues with technical features

## Q&A JULIAN THOMSON, HEAD OF ADVANCED DESIGN, GM

**Why did General Motors need a European design studio again?**
"GM was looking to redo all of its design studios – Warren, Pasadena and China – and it decided that Europe was a missing link, given both that it values fresh ideas and that it wants to expand with Cadillac in Europe and re-establish Corvette here."

**Did the Corvette project have a completely open brief?**
"We had some basic criteria – size and so forth. We also had the existing car; it's not as if we were being asked to make a smaller Corvette or a van Corvette. Just a Corvette. The car you see here is quite skeletal, with lots of exposed aero, because [GM design boss] Michael Simcoe liked that idea. But all the design language came from us."

**Is it an advantage to be new to GM?**
"Sometimes it's good. When your work goes to established studios, there are elements both of 'we didn't think of that' and 'that'll never work'. But all your input soon feeds into the whole. There have been lots of Corvette models; what you're doing is making a contribution."

**So it's not your job to produce the killer design?**
"No, not really. I've worked in other studios – VW was one – where people were battling one another to produce the winning design. Teams start chasing their tails, changing things they like into what they think will be winning elements. The result is a collection of very political designs. Nothing is fresh. We never want to be like that."

The UK concept is 4.67 metres long but just over one metre tall, highlighting a race car relationship and making it about the same height as the legendary, ultra-low Ford GT40.

The design cleverly incorporates iconic Corvette design heritage in a race car-inspired futuristic shape formed of lightweight composite outer panels. The designers say it focuses on clean forms and muscular shapes and is inspired by fighter jets for both sculptural and functional elements. It uses a strong centre line that both supports the 'wing doors' and splits the front and rear windscreens.

Thomson calls this feature 'Apex Vision' and describes it as a nod to Corvette's traditional centre-line focus, as well as being reminiscent of some of today's race cars. Its singular vertical central spine incorporates a structural element and provides a panoramic view of the road by limiting the usual intrusion of windscreen pillars.

"The exterior design also features a distinctive division between the upper and lower halves of the vehicle," said Thomson. "The upper half captures the Corvette's classic design elements, but in a futuristic manner. The lower half focuses on functional technical design, including EV battery technology embedded into the structure and aerodynamic elements designed to channel air efficiently without the need for wings or spoilers."

The UK Corvette concept uses a feature dubbed Aero Duality that uses fan assistance in the road-going version to direct air over and through the car's ducts to "fill its wake", thus increasing efficiency and cruising range. A hypothetical track version of the car has a deployable dorsal fin for stability, upper aero surfaces that reconfigure at speed and a sculpted underbody with fan assistance to deliver ground effects.

Summarising the wider Corvette project, Simcoe said it was vital that participating studios both paid homage to Corvette's historic DNA and brought their own unique creative interpretation to the project.

He said: "This is exactly what our advanced design studio network is intended to do: to push the envelope, challenge convention and imagine what could be."
**STEVE CROPLEY**

# IONIQ 6 GAINS SLEEK NEW LOOK

## Early facelift for Hyundai saloon ditches ducktail rear for "refined curves"

The Hyundai Ioniq 6 has been redesigned less than three years after it was revealed, losing its prominent ducktail rear wing and gaining a new sporty N-Line variant.

The makeover largely takes influence from 2022's race-inspired RN22e concept car, which itself previewed the hot Ioniq 6 N that the South Korean car maker has now confirmed will be revealed in July – possibly meaning a Goodwood Festival of Speed unveiling is on the cards.

Revealed at the Seoul motor show in Korea, the new Ioniq 6 is said by its maker to feature "more refined curves and enhanced proportions for a sleek and beautifully balanced silhouette".

In keeping with its billing as what Hyundai calls an "electric streamliner", its swooping, wind-cheating proportions are broadly unchanged, but the bonnet's profile has been raised and now leads into a sharper, "shark-nose" front end with a prominent splitter that "appears to slice through the air".

Meanwhile, the headlights have been swapped for much slimmer LED items with a pixel motif – matching the newer Ioniq 9 SUV – and the lower body is now finished in black to emphasise the car's aerodynamically optimised silhouette.

The rear end has been heavily reworked too, with the addition of a chrome-trimmed rear bumper and the removal of the prominent ducktail behind the rear screen in favour of a subtler extended boot lip designed to "maintain aerodynamic performance while achieving a smoother, more refined silhouette".

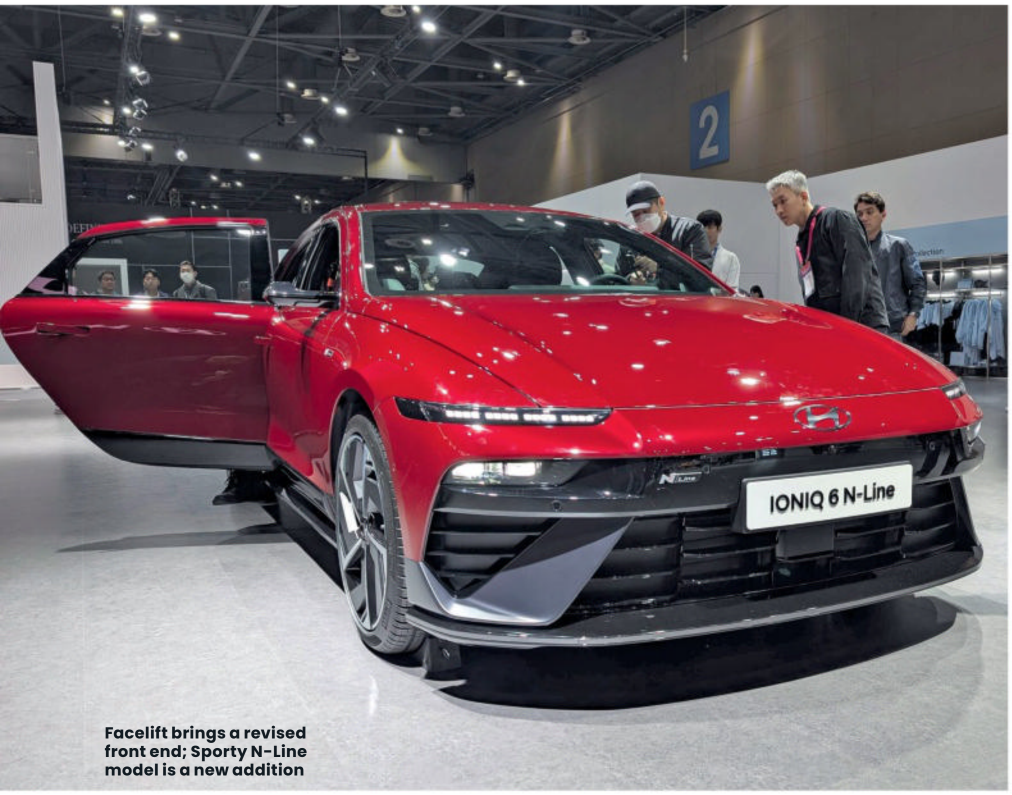
Changes to the cabin are more subtle but there's a redesigned steering wheel, as seen in the Ioniq 9, and the centre console controls have been rearranged to improve ease of use.

Technically, the Ioniq 6 is unchanged, keeping a 77.4kWh battery and either a 225bhp rear motor or a 321bhp dual-motor set-up.

Maximum range was 339 miles, but it's unclear whether the design tweaks have impacted this. Charging speeds max out at 233kW.

Hyundai hasn't yet given an indication of a UK launch date for the new-look Ioniq 6, or any pricing details, but it's expected in showrooms in the next few months at a small premium over the current £47,000.

**FELIX PAGE**



Facelift brings a revised front end; Sporty N-Line model is a new addition

### Q&A SIMON LOASBY, VICE-PRESIDENT, HYUNDAI STYLING GROUP

**The update has come only three years since the car was released. Is this how you wanted the car to look originally?**
"We look at it now and we're like: 'Why didn't we do that before?' So time sometimes helps you and then it looks as though it always looked like this, because that's how it should have looked."

**Why did you remove the deck spoiler?**
"We spoke with the aero guys and they suggested having one spoiler – instead of two and making the ducktail bigger – [to increase efficiency]. You get that simplicity for it."

**What can we expect when the Ioniq 6 N arrives in July?**
"The wing. You've got all those curves on top so we need to counter the lift. Compared to Ioniq 5 N, we've had the chance to widen the fenders – who doesn't love a wide body? – and it's got even more stance, even more squat and even more cool factor."

# HYUNDAI BACKS HYDROGEN WITH BOLD NEW NEXO

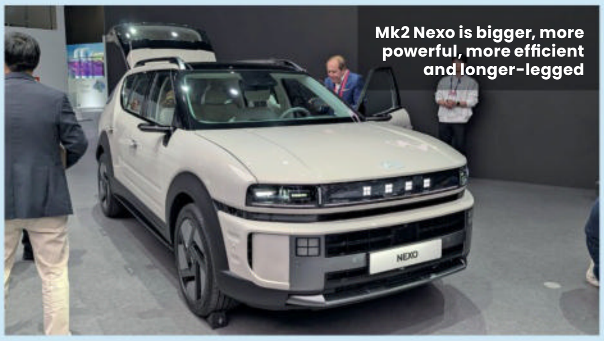
HYUNDAI HAS REAFFIRMED its commitment to hydrogen cars, revealing the second generation of its Nexo fuel cell SUV.

Based on 2024's Initium concept, it introduces a new 'Art of Steel' design language to distinguish the brand's future FCEVs.

Key features include the grid-shaped 'H-two' front and rear lights, and H-shaped surfaces on the front and rear bumpers.

As well as a radically different design from its predecessor, the new Nexo is longer, taller and wider, repositioning it as an alternative to battery-powered EVs such as the BMW iX3 and Tesla Model Y.

The Nexo receives the same 'connected cockpit' dashboard as the Ioniq 5, with a pair of 12.3in displays. Traditional side mirrors are replaced by cameras.



Mk2 Nexo is bigger, more powerful, more efficient and longer-legged

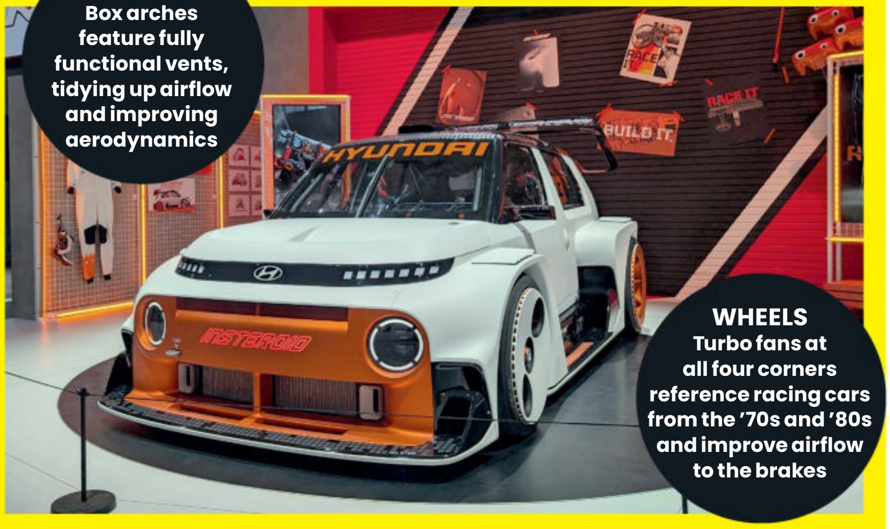
The second-generation Nexo houses a completely reworked powertrain. Its fuel cell stack's electrical output has been increased by 16% to 110kW and the battery's maximum output doubled to 80kW. Power from the electric motor is boosted by 40bhp to 201bhp.

The hydrogen tank has grown to 6.69kg, which, in combination with the more efficient powertrain, boosts the range beyond 435 miles.

Hyundai said the new car will appear in "global markets this year" but has yet to commit to offering it in the UK. When its predecessor went off sale here in 2022 after three years, just 50 examples

had been sold. Key issues include the UK's lack of hydrogen filling stations.

Previous CEO Jaehoon Chang (now vice-chair of the Hyundai Motor Group) said last year that hydrogen cars are a "chicken and egg" issue, on which the brand will lead the charge.



**BODYKIT**
Box arches feature fully functional vents, tidying up airflow and improving aerodynamics

**WHEELS**
Turbo fans at all four corners reference racing cars from the '70s and '80s and improve airflow to the brakes

# INSTER TURNS WILD ELECTRIC HOT HATCH ON STEROIDS

HYUNDAI HAS REIMAGINED the new Inster urban EV as a futuristic hot hatch with aggressive styling and a stripped-out interior, taking inspiration from video gaming.

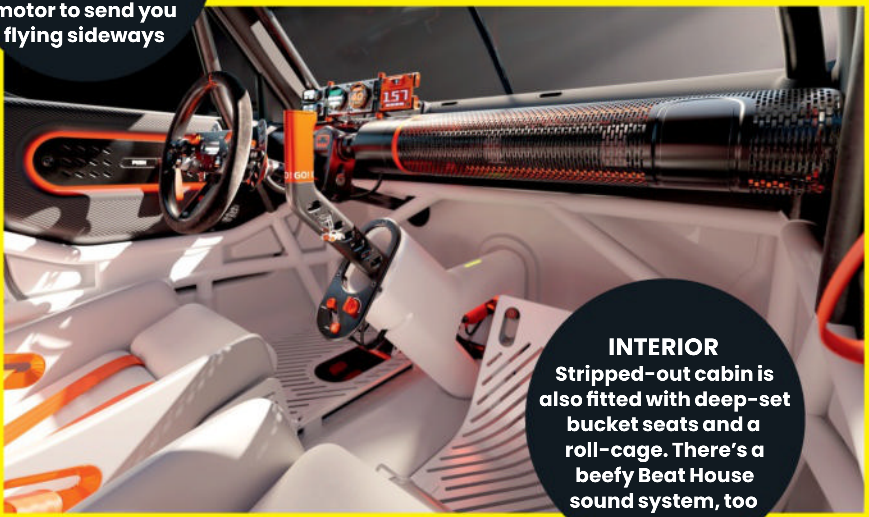
Called the Insteroid – a portmanteau of 'Inster' and 'steroid' – it follows last year's 641bhp, 546lb ft, 3.4sec-to-0-62mph RN24 Concept, which was described as a 'rolling lab' for future hot Hyundai EVs.

"The Insteroid represents a modern take on the idea of a dream car," said Eduardo Ramírez, chief designer for Hyundai Europe. "It is designed to inspire and create enthusiasm."

Although the Insteroid is officially conceptual, its existence – like that of the RN24 – suggests there's an appetite within the company to produce a hot version of its smallest EV.

Indeed, Hyundai acknowledges that the "Insteroid is another step in the hot-selling production model's journey", following the beefed-up Inster Cross that's due to arrive in dealers shortly.

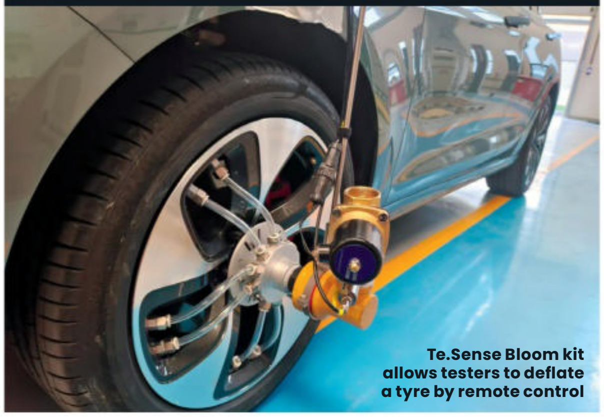
**'HYDRAULIC' HANDBRAKE**
Carried over from the RN24, this vertical lever locks up the rear motor to send you flying sideways



**INTERIOR**
Stripped-out cabin is also fitted with deep-set bucket seats and a roll-cage. There's a beefy Beat House sound system, too

## Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Te.Sense Bloom kit allows testers to deflate a tyre by remote control

# WHY NEW PUNCTURE-ON-DEMAND TECH IS A SAFE BET

AUTONOMOUS AND SEMI-autonomous cars bring with them new methods of safety testing. What happens, for example, if a tyre deflates suddenly when the car is doing the driving rather than the human and how well will it cope?

US firm Koala Technologies has developed a new piece of equipment that enables a road tester to deflate a tyre by remote control from within the car. The kit meets the requirements of existing regulations, including the FMVSS 110 US federal standard. Specifically, this US regulation is intended to ensure tyres have sufficient load-carrying capacity and are appropriate for the kind of use the vehicle gets. It also verifies that a tyre remains on the rim when it deflates at speed.

Koala Technologies' new kit also meets the emerging standards for EV lateral stability tests with and without the motor engaged, which are already mandatory in some markets, such as China.

Called the Te.Sense Bloom, the kit is mounted to the wheel of a vehicle, which could be a car or larger, and has a central air ejector valve with a volume and flow capacity designed to emulate a sudden loss of pressure due to tyre failure.

The equipment is plumbed into the inside of the tyre by tubes and connectors screwed into the rim. When the operator presses a button, the valve opens, causing instant deflation, just as if the tyre suffered a real-world blowout. The equipment is designed to be a reusable turnkey system that gives repeatable results.

Koala says the kit has a number of advantages over existing methods, which usually involve destroying multiple tyres. A traditional approach taken at proving grounds is to drive a vehicle so that two wheels on one side run over a series of aggressive 'cleats', which rapidly deflate and destroy a pair of tyres.

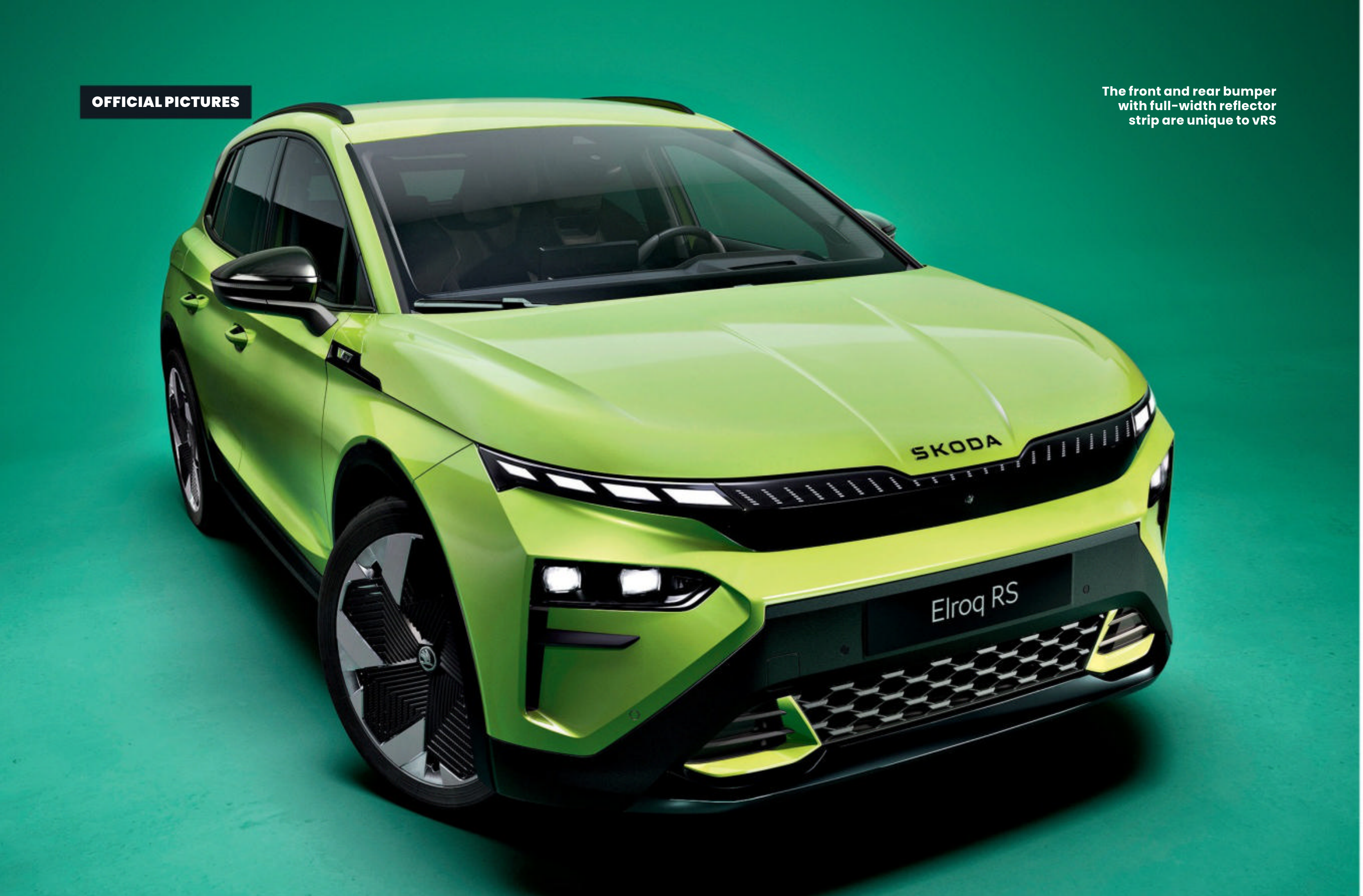
There are two problems with that. One is that stability tests may require one tyre to be deflated, leaving the other three intact, so deflating two on one side may not work for certain tests. The other is the cost and sustainability issue of trashing two tyres instead of one.

Te.Sense Bloom avoids that and can be installed on any corner of the vehicle. Although it involves modifications to one of the car's rims to install the connectors and tubes from the central valve, Koala provides a wheel set-up service, if testers want it.

Rapid tyre deflation can be triggered from inside a vehicle or remotely and works with tyre pressures of up to 100psi and at up to 87mph. It also accurately captures the tyre pressure data, which can be used for detailed analysis of the vehicle and tyre behaviour when the tyre deflates.

And that unusual name? It's got nothing to do with cars or tyres. The maker chooses aquatic names for its products and Bloom relates to the appearance of algae in oceans and waterways.

**OFFICIAL PICTURES**



The front and rear bumper with full-width reflector strip are unique to vRS

# SKODA TURNS NEW ELROQ INTO ELECTRIC HOT HATCH

## Stiffer and lower suspension, sharper steering, extra 52bhp for vRS

Skoda has given the new Elroq crossover, its smallest electric car, a performance variant.

The Elroq vRS receives a number of improvements, including a 52bhp bump in power to 335bhp and a stiffened chassis, plus notable design changes.

That extra punch comes from the same dual-motor powertrain as in the related Volkswagen ID 4 GTX and means the Elroq vRS can dispatch the 0-62mph sprint in 5.4sec – 1.2sec faster than the regular Elroq.

Skoda claimed the stiffened chassis, sharper steering and lowered suspension (by 15mm at the front and 10mm at the rear) combine to create a "sportier driving feel".

More powerful front brakes are also fitted.

While the Elroq vRS can be distinguished from the standard Elroq by a new roof rail, black accents and 21in alloy wheels, it's the new 'Sport' and 'Futuristic' selectable exterior sounds that will be most noticeable to passers-by.

Given the Elroq vRS's range-topping billing, the level of standard kit has been raised. It includes LED matrix headlights, heated front seats, a 12-speaker sound system and an electric tailgate, while Dynamic Chassis Control (meaning adaptive dampers) is an option.

The usual 5in digital cockpit and 13in central infotainment touchscreen remain but are given vRS-specific graphics.

The Elroq vRS draws its energy from the same 84kWh battery pack as the Elroq 85, but its extra performance and bigger wheels cost it 20 miles of range, at 340 miles. The battery can be charged at speeds of up to 170kW.

Pricing for the Elroq vRS has yet to be announced, but it is expected to cost marginally more than the standard Elroq's top end price of £41,600.

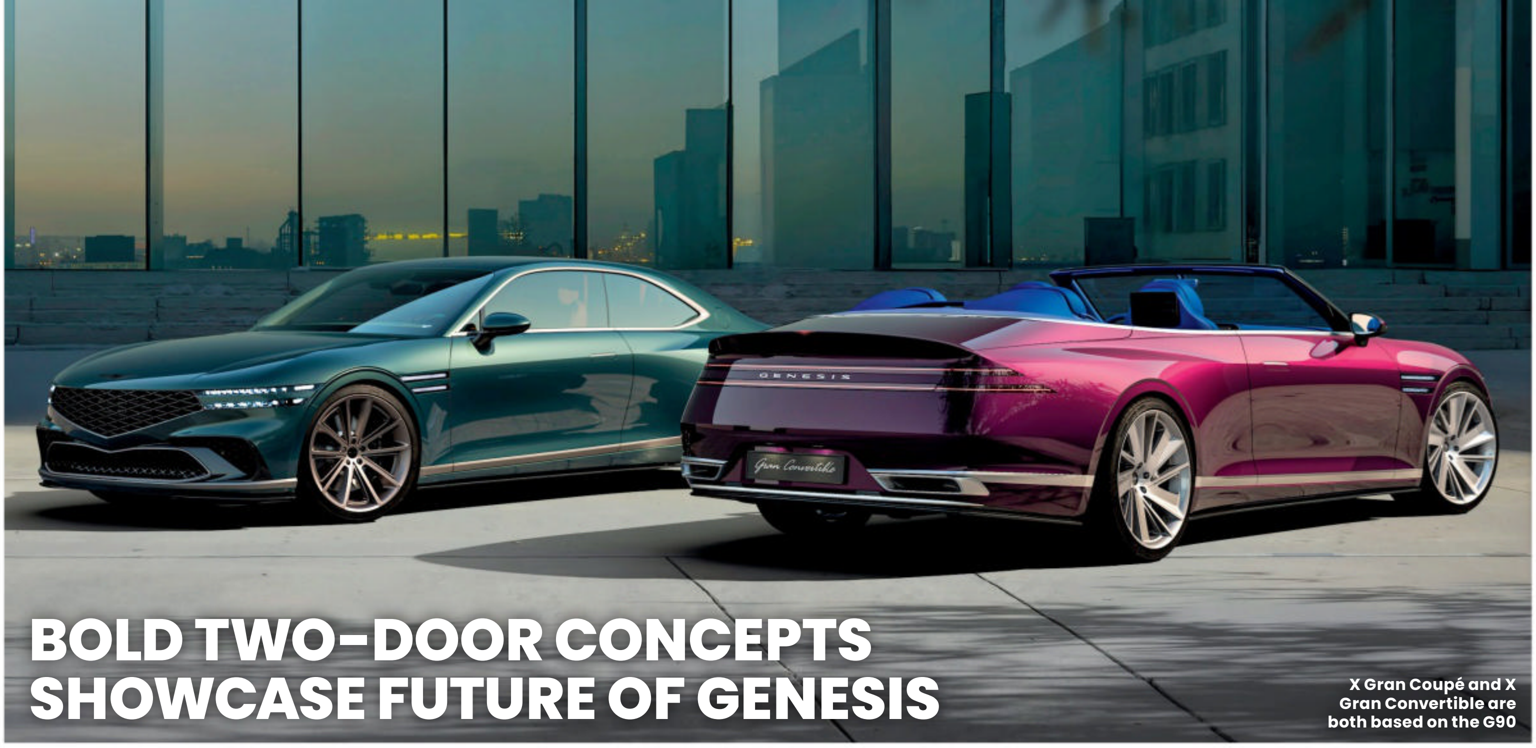
UK deliveries are due to start this summer.

**WILL RIMELL**

Elroq vRS follows template set by larger Enyaq vRS in 2022

Interior gets black microfibre with green stitching, faux carbonfibre

# BOLD TWO-DOOR CONCEPTS SHOWCASE FUTURE OF GENESIS

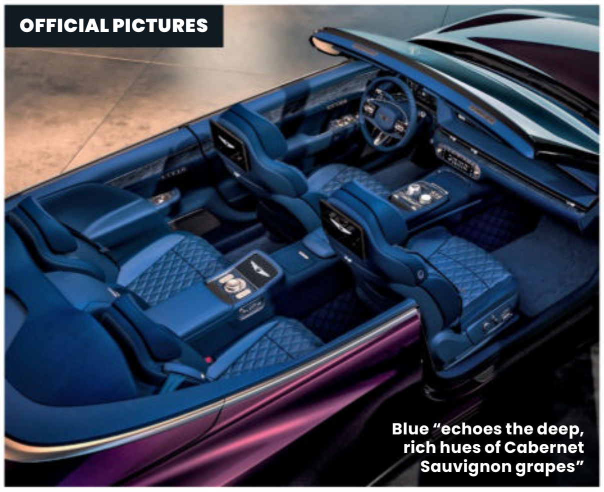


X Gran Coupé and X Gran Convertible are both based on the G90

TWO STRIKING NEW Genesis concept cars spawned from the Korean luxury brand's G90 flagship showcase its "new chapter".

Unveiled at last week's Seoul motor show, the X Gran Coupé and X Gran Convertible have been created to "demonstrate the brand's future position" and arrive 10 years after it was spun out of Hyundai.

Both concepts clearly resemble the donor limousine (sharing the same front and rear twin-light bar design) and have been created to show that there is room in the Genesis line-up to expand with niche model derivatives, design boss Luc Donckerwolke told Autocar.



**OFFICIAL PICTURES**

Blue "echoes the deep, rich hues of Cabernet Sauvignon grapes"

Features such as the frameless windows and pillarless doors and the extensive use of quilted materials appear to be almost production-ready, suggesting such elements will appear in road cars.

The duo build on the three X Concepts that Genesis revealed in 2021 and 2022 but take their luxury billing a step further.

For example, both are decorated with crystals and the convertible is presented in such a way as to "capture the spirit of fine wines".

This luxury positioning is also reflected by the aluminium-spoked steering wheel, screens embedded into the rear of the front seats and use of micro-perforated olive wood.

No powertrain details have been revealed, but if they were in production today, the cars would most likely adopt the G90's 409bhp 3.5-litre petrol V6.

In Europe, the G90 is currently sold only in Germany and Switzerland.

# ROWAN UNEXPECTEDLY DISMISSED AS VOLVO CEO

JIM ROWAN IS no longer the CEO of Volvo – and Autocar understands that he was pushed out of the Swedish car company.

The Briton, who joined from tech firm Dyson in 2022, has been replaced by his predecessor Håkan Samuelsson on a two-year basis while a permanent successor is sought.

While no explanation was given by either Rowan or Volvo, two separate sources have confirmed to Autocar that he was forced out. "It was quick and a surprise," one said.

His departure in favour of the company's 74-year-old former boss provoked the most puzzled response among industry watchers.

"It's the biggest surprise of all the [recent industry] changes," said former Nissan and Aston Martin senior executive Andy Palmer. "In my mind, he was doing great."

The case for replacing Rowan wasn't on the face of it clear, as he had overseen one of the most successful periods in Volvo's history.

Last year, the firm posted record-breaking profits of SEK 27 billion (£2.1bn) on a decent margin of 6.8%, and its car sales hit a record high of 763,389.

Volvo has successfully navigated the push into the electric era, with EVs accounting for almost a quarter of all its sales last year. Include PHEVs and that share rises to 46%.

Rowan had always been convinced by the need to continue the electrification process that was started by Samuelsson.

"I'm flabbergasted sometimes by a lot of our competitors who still want to push for internal combustion engines," he told Autocar recently.

Rowan tapped into his tech background as Volvo boss

However, there was also turbulence under Rowan. For one, Volvo has been forced to roll back its all-electric plan for 2030 on the back of slowing EV demand in the US, its second-largest market, but is persisting with the SPA3 EV platform that will spawn an electric version of its global best-seller, the XC60 SUV, in 2026.

The scale of the challenge ahead was starting to be revealed in 2024. While Volvo's sales in Europe were up an impressive 25%, helped by the new EX30 small electric SUV, demand fell by 8% in China and 3% in the US.

Another black mark against Rowan was Volvo's share price declining by 50% in the past 12 months.

Samuelsson led firm from 2012 to 2022

Investors were warned on a 27 March call that revenues were going to be down in the first quarter. That plus the US's new car import tariffs and the "sudden recall" of Samuelsson "suggests Volvo Cars is stepping up crisis management to protect liquidity", claimed Philippe Houchois, analyst at bank Jefferies.

Samuelsson is well known to Volvo parent company Geely and its boss Li Shufu as a trusted and thrifty steward in his 10 years heading Volvo.

Probe found car makers agreed to withhold recycling information from the public

# CAR INDUSTRY 'CARTELS' HIT WITH £460M FINES

## Car makers, trade bodies colluded over vehicle recycling

Ten major car makers and the British and European automotive trade bodies have agreed to pay fines totalling £77.7 million after admitting to breaking UK competition laws, while the European Commission (EC) has fined 15 car makers a combined £382.7m in a related probe.

The UK fines have been levied by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) following a three-year investigation into what it ruled was an illegal agreement between the manufacturers not to compete against each other when advertising the percentage of their cars that could be recycled.

BMW, Ford, Jaguar Land Rover, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Renault, Toyota and Volkswagen have all been fined by the CMA, as have Stellantis (as the owner of Citroën, Peugeot and Vauxhall) and General Motors (as the former owner of Vauxhall).

The UK's Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the European Automobile Manufacturers Association were also fined.

Meanwhile, the EC has fined 15 firms and the ACEA after a parallel investigation into what it called a cartel concerning end-of-life vehicle recycling. They are the 10 firms fined by the CMA plus Honda, Hyundai-Kia, Mazda, Suzuki and Volvo.

Mercedes-Benz was also involved in both schemes but won't incur any penalty because of its co-operation with the investigations.

Both the CMA and EC rulings centred on two key areas.

The first concerned the sustainability information, including recyclability, that manufacturers are legally required to detail in their advertising.

This information is required so that potential buyers can consider how environmentally friendly cars are and compare their green credentials.

The CMA found that all the firms in the scheme agreed not to advertise if their vehicles exceeded the minimum recyclability requirement of 85%.

With the exception of Renault, they also agreed not to inform customers about the percentage of recycled material used in their vehicles.

It is illegal for firms to agree not to compete with each other in this manner.

The scheme, spelt out in a document called the ELV Charta and referred to as a "gentleman's agreement", ran from May 2002 until September 2017.

The second aspect of the ruling concerned the service that manufacturers are required to offer their customers to recycle 'end-of-life vehicles'.

That process is often farmed out to third parties, but the CMA found that manufacturers operated a "buyers' cartel" from April 2004 until May 2018.

Eight firms (BMW, Ford, Mercedes, Peugeot-Citroën, Renault, Toyota, Vauxhall and Volkswagen) agreed that they wouldn't pay companies to handle this service, meaning specialist companies were effectively unable to negotiate prices with manufacturers.

The ACEA, the SMMT, Nissan and Mitsubishi joined the scheme in 2006; JLR joined in 2016.

According to the CMA, the ACEA chaired meetings and intervened when firms operated outside the agreements, and the SMMT became involved to settle a number of disputes.

Lucilia Falsarella Pereira, the CMA's senior director of competition enforcement, said: "This kind of collusion can limit consumers' ability to make informed choices and lower the incentive for companies to invest in new initiatives."

Teresa Ribera, an EC executive vice-president, said: "We will not tolerate cartels of any kind.

"High-quality recycling in key sectors such as automotive will be central to meeting our circular-economy objectives, not only to cut waste and emissions but also to reduce dependencies, lower production costs and create a more sustainable and competitive industrial model in Europe."

**JAMES ATTWOOD**

## SEAT AND CUPRA BOSS GRIFFITHS STEPS DOWN

SEAT AND CUPRA CEO Wayne Griffiths has left the Spanish firm after nearly five years at the helm.

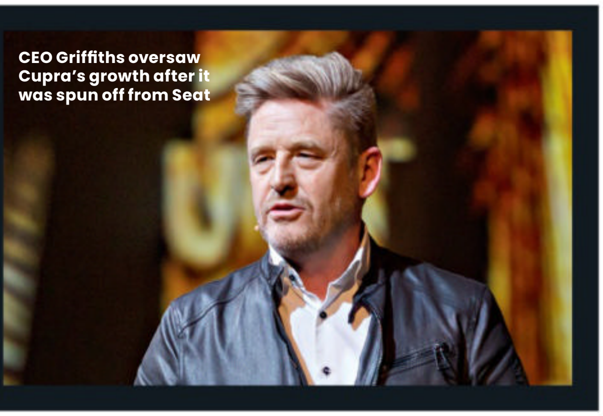
Griffiths stepped down with immediate effect "at his own request" so that he could "pursue new challenges", said Seat.

At the time of writing, it was not known if the Briton had a new job to go to.

He will be replaced on an interim basis by Seat's production and logistics boss Markus Haupt, with a permanent successor to be announced at a later date.

Griffiths was named Seat and Cupra CEO in 2020 and helped Cupra to become one of Europe's fastest-growing car brands.

Thomas Schäfer, the VW Group's core brands boss, thanked him for an "excellent contribution".



CEO Griffiths oversaw Cupra's growth after it was spun off from Seat

**MY WEEK IN CARS**

# Steve Cropley

McGloin hasn't let paralysis stop her from being a hotshot racer

## MONDAY

I have a new heroine. I recently met Nathalie McGloin, the world's one and only female tetraplegic racing driver, when she made a presentation about her life and the performance driving business she runs in an interview at Gilks' Garage Café, Kineton, a few miles from JLR's HQ.

McGloin races an adapted Porsche Cayman S and regularly beats blokes in equal cars despite having no use of her legs and limited use of her hands and arms. A natural competitor, she came to driving following a career in wheelchair rugby that began after her neck was broken at 16 in someone else's road accident. She is an eloquent speaker, describing her discovery of competitive driving as "a story of freedom".

As well as racing and running her driving academy, McGloin is president of the FIA's Disability and Accessibility Commission, appointed by Jean Todt, and represents several linked charities.

How she finds the energy is hard to fathom, but what impresses most is her matter-of-fact honesty about people like herself; how they feel and how they need to be treated. Few groups need eloquent ambassadors as badly as the disabled (McGloin is fine with that term), but the situation is being powerfully improved by her mighty efforts. I was deeply impressed.

Mk1 Audi TT is one of the best car designs not just of the '90s but of all time

> **"Revisiting 1990s cars was more fun than I expected"**

## TUESDAY

What fun, writing my bits for this week's 1990s 10-car test (p42). It turned out to be more fun than I expected: it came alive when I did a bit of enquiring into the key characteristics of an era I had forgotten. Back then, the internet was just beginning, computers were boxes you 'drove' at work and mobile phones were rare. That made our lives and our cars much more analogue: you can see that in the beguiling simplicity of the cars Matt Saunders selected for our stories.

Two of them stick out for me: the Ford Mondeo and the Audi TT. The former was such a simple, supple and easy-driving car, and its huge glass area and low waist made driving it a different experience from today – arguably better. The latter was an original, uncorrupted piece of design, every bit as distinguished inside as out. Hard to believe its age.

Best of all, this was an era when most car makers had discovered rustproofing. This matters: find a decent car and it will last. Not something you can say about earlier decades.

## THURSDAY AM

Commuting from Cirencester to Twickenham this morning, something was different: all those cones that had been lining the M4 motorway for many miles around Reading had disappeared overnight. It seems the road fixers have at last provided us with enough of those yellow-painted motorway breakdown refuges for safe passage.

It's bizarre what springs into my head at times like this. I found myself regretting not making a rule-of-thumb, cones-per-mile calculation while they were still in place (I bet it would be a telephone number). I also wondered where traffic cones go to die and whether there's a warehouse big enough to hold them all. Finally, will the businesses that make them now go broke? Suddenly there's a glut.

## THURSDAY PM

Amazing McLaren news! It has been clear for a while that the car company needed refounding (even allowing for the continuing excellence of its cars), and now it's happening (see p4).

More than additional hypercars, I now thirst for McLaren to create other types of car: can you imagine a baby coupé? The trick, of course, is to find markets for low-volume cars at the money they will have to charge. And won't it still need a big technology partner, like Geely or Mercedes-Benz? I trust the wise heads at Forseven have been at work on these questions.

### AND ANOTHER THING

Half the world's EV chargers contain Chademo connectors in addition to the Type 2 and CCS ones that have become almost universal, and it's getting hard to understand why the Chademo ones are still there, limiting availability for real-life users. I proved my point in Manchester last week: on a well-used charger, the Chademo connector was covered in cobwebs.

**GET IN TOUCH**
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

# Matt Prior

Just as I watched the last episode of Reacher and feared my television well was running dry, a new series of Bosch: Legacy arrived to make going to the gym less boring. So begins another series in which the star bounds around saving the day, breaking a few rules/laws/bones as necessary, and ultimately gets paid badly or not at all for their trouble.

I wondered if it was just people like me who were drawn to this sort of story, but whether it's Buffy or Ludwig, Harry Potter or Stranger Things, plus about eleventy-dozen superhero films, the theme is the same. See also basically everything from The Littlest Hobo to James Bond. It's a massively popular genre. Fact is, loads of us like a central character who's not perfect but who knows what it takes to get things done and, once it's all over, gets hardly any recognition.

Is this because it's how we see, or would like to see, ourselves? Does it reflect our own personalities, even if our struggles are against jobsworths, unfair parking fines and computers saying no, rather than criminal masterminds? (I mean, same difference, right?)

And if that's the case, I wonder whether that's why, as many of us do, I find myself drawn to a certain kind of car: something a bit quirky, made by an underdog, probably not the best car around but, for all its failings, something with charm. A car with noble intentions, if such a thing is possible.

At the moment, I'm going through a phase of being asked what good cars I've driven recently. There have been a number of very respectable, very efficient and extremely effective ones. And when it comes to the moment of answering, I often can't remember a single one of them. I can, though, remember most of the miles I've driven in, say, a Noble M600, an Ineos Grenadier or a Morgan. Even a Citroën Ami. Or my own Audi A2 or old Land Rover Defender.

TV's vagrant dog never had a proper name. How about Ami or Defender?

These cars are all flawed or compromised in some way or another (within reason: they haven't murdered anyone for the greater good), but I find them more compelling than the squeaky clean, goody two-shoes, far more accomplished alternatives. Steve Cropley's new Jeep Wrangler (p78) is another case in point.

I don't just mean it's possible to like bad cars. It is, of course, but that's a different conversation that usually involves nostalgia. What I mean is that there's an attraction to the underappreciated, to a character that's trying to do a good thing against difficult odds.

> **"We would prefer something that is a bit more crap"**

The film reviewer (and classic Ford owner) Mark Kermode says he would rather a film set out to achieve something noble and miss its mark than achieve its goal of being blandly efficient. One might think differently about cars, I suppose, when you have to live with one for three years and be confident it will be worth something afterwards, rather than just bearing with it for two hours, so from a reviewing perspective, our approaches may remain a little different. But I do think there is a virtuousness, a pleasing honesty, about a core of people who set out to give a car really positive traits, so that the result doesn't look like it was designed and engineered by endless committees.

And isn't there something endearing about a flawed character? Some gratification in recognising a positive trait that we don't think everybody else sees? Maybe appreciating these things is the same as preferring a slightly rickety but pleasingly proportioned old house to a brilliantly insulated new one whose floors are level but which has no aesthetic charm. We know that the one that works properly is better, but we would prefer something that is in some ways – how to put it delicately? – a bit more crap.

By cheering on the underappreciated underdog, it positively reaffirms that we have a kindness of understanding, plus it makes us believe we have the nous and intellect to see what others might have missed. In other words, it makes us feel a bit good about ourselves. On the telly, those strings are pulled by design. In automotive terms, I suspect it's more accidental. But the net effect can be similar.

**GET IN TOUCH**
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Prior much prefers quirky underdogs like the Morgan Super 3 to flawless operators

GETTY IMAGES

RACING LINES

# Damien Smith

The 1970s was a wild time of screaming vees and powerslides

I love the banshee scream of naturally aspirated racing engines. V8s, V10s, V12s: it doesn't matter. As a child of the 1980s, the nervy anticipation of an aural sensual assault was a significant part of the thrill when heading to a race track. That's why catching a round of the historic Masters Racing Legends series for Formula 1 cars of 1966-1985 is always a nostalgic throwback treat. Cosworth DFV V8s are the soundtrack of my childhood.

That's also why I'm surprised at my own response to the growing debate that has entered the mainstream over whether F1 should return to V10s with (so-called) sustainable fuel.

F1's next generation of hybrid power units is due next year, founded on a desire for a near-50:50 split on electrical power and turbo V6 propulsion. Six manufacturers are committed: incumbents Mercedes, Ferrari and Honda and newcomers Audi and Ford (via Red Bull's self-built powertrain) for 2026 and General Motors later in the decade. For Audi in particular, the powertrain package was a principal factor in its commitment to finally taking the F1 plunge.

So the apparent about-turn in thinking, both within F1 and governing body the FIA, is itself a surprise. The size and weight gain in this hybrid era is counterintuitive to natural F1 instincts, but that's not exactly news. Is this recent shift driven by latent emotion finally bubbling to the surface or a belief that such a move would be the best solution as the automotive sands shift away from electrification?

Perhaps it's a bit of both. But talk of running the new regulations for only three years and then switching to a possible V10 formula must be unsettling and baffling for the executives who have signed off on heavy investment for these complex hybrid power units.

GETTY IMAGES / KEVIN SMITH

## A DRIVER'S VIEW

Fernando Alonso is in his 22nd F1 season. He won consecutive world titles with first a Renault V10 and then a Renault V8 way back in 2005 and 2006, so he has a unique perspective among current drivers. His reaction wasn't what you might expect.

> **"Traditionalists miss the noise, but what do modern fans think?"**

"Obviously I love the V10 era, the V8s and the sound of those cars that we all miss," he said ahead of the Japanese Grand Prix. "We're in a different world now. Technology has evolved and we now have incredibly efficient engines that use about one-third of the fuel we used to. We can't just go against our time and our hybrid era. We can't forget how efficient the cars are now compared to the past. This is something very positive that we have. We move on from certain things, and what we have now is a very good F1 and a very good moment for the sport."

The Spaniard compared returning to V10s to returning to single-seaters without halo safety bars over their cockpits. Of course cars looked better without them, but they save lives, so no argument can justify their removal.

Alonso loved racing V10s but wouldn't want them back

## WISE OR FOOLISH?

For the past 20 years, F1 has consciously evolved to remain in line with the direction of travel of the automotive mainstream in an effort to offer relevancy to car manufacturers.

There have been times over the years when I've questioned whether it should decouple itself and just go its own way in the interest of chasing what is simply the best and most exciting racing formula. But then I wonder how vulnerable F1 would become if it were even perceived to exist in its own bubble without offering a technological contribution to the troubled outside world. In other words, more or less turning back the clock to the freewheeling 1970s.

Is that really possible? More importantly, is it wise? F1 has never been more popular and finally speaks to a younger and more diverse fanbase. That's the best thing about grand prix racing today, especially as this enthusiasm is trickling down into other corners, as kart circuit owners and promoters will tell you. So what do modern fans think? We know traditionalists love what they miss, but do new followers crave a return to noise? They don't remember leaving race tracks with a ringing in their ears or even a dull headache, as I did on occasion as a kid. Is that what they want?

Also, what would be the quantifiable gain if the banshee were to return? Would F1's popularity soar even higher? Would sponsors flock in greater number? On the one hand, I can't wait to hear the pure V12 howl of Aston Martin's new Valkyrie hypercar when I get to Le Mans in June; on the other, I'm unconvinced that chasing noise for the sake of it actually matters.

Consciously going back in search of how things used to be, of reigniting an old passion, is generally a risk in life. Modern F1 exasperates at times, and I'm glad that I'm old enough to remember how it once was. But I'm with Alonso: let's live in the present.

# YOUR VIEWS

**WRITE TO** autocar@haymarket.com

**Letter of the week**

## VOLVO HAS LOST ITS WAY

As a Volvo enthusiast, I read Jim Rowan's interview (19 March) with an increasing sense of alarm. A car is absolutely not an electronic device on wheels. What we do with our PCs, our smartphones and our cars are three separate things. I remember when, with Windows 8, Microsoft tried to make my PC like a smartphone: it was a disaster. Boeing recently tried to mask a poor mechanical design with a software patch and in the process cut the pilot out of the equation: it cost many hundreds of lives and nearly brought down the company.

EVs are still in their infancy; Volvo should take a leaf out of Lucid's book and concentrate on motor efficiency, packaging and cool design. I suggest that creating a full stack of software from the silicon level up to the user interface is just plain wrong; what's required is a discretised approach where functional safety is optimised between powertrain, chassis electronics, ADAS, infotainment and so on. This clear functional decomposition will ease debugging and improve reliability. I'd rather Bosch did my ABS modulator programming than Volvo.

Anyone who understands crash safety will be aware that a huge part of it is mechanical engineering. Take a look at Romain Grosjean's terrifying Formula 1 crash in 2020: the astonishing mechanical engineering that saved his life was enabled by computer software running on powerful hardware, but the software itself was irrelevant in the moment of the crash. AI is not yet good enough to analyse the causes and come up with fixes.

The last modern Volvo I drove – a bland, medium-sized SUV that could have come from any brand – tried to steer me into a concrete barrier in roadworks. I had to wrench the steering wheel back to save the situation.

Volvo needs to embrace cool design; celebrate its distinctive past; create cars with best-in-class safety; and be unique in embracing ergonomics to make the car easier to use with simple, clear, physical controls. It needs to remember that cars are machines for travelling in, more like a mobile house than a mobile phone.

**Robin Hall**
**Hall Engineering and Design**

### TECH ARROGANCE

[Now-departed] CEO Jim Rowan's vision depresses me, as a newish Volvo owner (19 March).

The XC40 is a good car severely let down by very, very poor software.

The safety features are particularly bad: my car is wrong almost as often as it is right about the speed limit (including such ridiculous errors as claiming a 130kph limit in central Rotterdam); the emergency braking system activates whenever a pedestrian in a narrow street moves towards the car, even when there is little risk of that person stepping in front of the car; and the lane assistance makes driving with it activated virtually impossible on narrow B-roads.

Having to operate key functions via a touchscreen is a safety hazard.

The entertainment system only works well if you stream music; you can no longer play music stored on a device as that isn't 'progressive' enough for Volvo.

Sadly, as the interview shows, Volvo's leadership suffers from the same arrogance as so much of the tech industry. Even when faced with strong evidence that there is something wrong, they just shrug it off and keep going. The fact that other manufacturers are even more wrong-headed won't save Volvo.

**JP Onstwedder**
**Via autocar.co.uk**

### STRETCHING THE TRUTH

I've never been a fan of car adverts, especially when they make claims about MPG that are inaccurate in that you're unable to get them in real-world driving.

This was irritating for ICE cars, but in some ways not a particularly big deal; I think for the average buyer, as long as you get good MPG and you don't find yourself spending more on fuel than your last car, the exact stats are relatively arbitrary. I see, though, that the practice has carried over into EVs, and I find it more egregious and misleading.

Take this, for example: "The longest successful points kick in international rugby history was 70 yards, eight and a half inches. That's nothing. The new Volkswagen ID 7 Tourer has a range of up to 424 miles or 746,240 yards. It's got the distance. Volkswagen ID 7 Tourer: miles better."

Then, in fast-speak: "Official test range 358 to 424 miles when fully charged, depending on trim. May not reflect real-life driving."

Will the ID 7 Tourer go as far as Volkswagen's advert suggests?

Mileage is so much more important in electric cars. It can be the difference between getting home or not, or at the very least a stop to charge.

This advert makes it clear that good mileage is a big selling point. Must we put up with this nonsense? I have a lot more respect for a firm that won't try to hoodwink me and will just tell me how it is; what I can expect from its product.

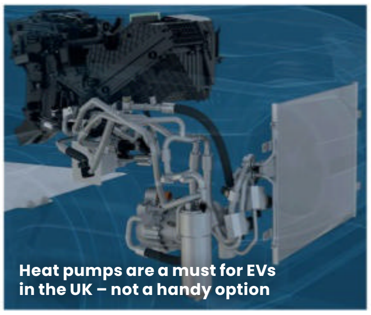
As EVs become the norm, the car industry as a whole should make a decision to do accurate tests that the buying public can rely on. If there is any doubt, they should err on the lower side, so that if you get more, you will be pleasantly surprised.

Treat us like adults, please, car manufacturers.

**J Evans**
**Via email**

### BACK TO THE '60s

The Volkswagen ID 7's WLTP consumption figure of 4.7 miles per kWh is good news. The bad news is that a heat pump – which uses heat from the powertrain to help warm the cabin in cold weather – isn't standard but a £1050 option.



Heat pumps are a must for EVs in the UK – not a handy option

My dad took delivery of a new Ford Prefect in 1960 and had to pay £17 10s extra for a heater. Seems prices have gone up a bit.

**David Allen-Butler**
**Wittersham, Kent**

### WINTER DISCONTENT

I bought a new Honda e:Ny1 in March 2024. I was told it had a range of 253 miles but if I used the heater

GETTY IMAGES / VALEO

Ypsilon isn't the rangiest EV, but things could be worse, says one e:Ny1 owner

and air-con, the mileage would be reduced a bit. What I wasn't told was that during the winter months it would be significantly reduced, to about 160 miles on a full charge, before using anything extra. Using the heater, it falls to about 120 miles.

It has been back to Honda three times and they found no fault. It has had a battery update – still no better.

Now that we're in warmer weather, it's about 230 miles on a full charge before using anything.

Apparently it needed a heat pump, but this isn't available.

I told Honda the car is not fit for purpose: it would need four charges on a trip to London, which I couldn't do cost-wise, to say nothing of the downtime. Honda said sorry. I then went to Honda Finance, but they (eventually) gave me the same reply.

I've now lodged complaints with The Motor Ombudsman and the Financial Ombudsman Service.

**Name supplied**
**Via email**

### SAME AS IT EVER WAS

Why was it such a surprise to Kris Culmer that the range of his Lancia Ypsilon EV fell dramatically when he did a steady 80mph ('The brand that refused to die', 19 March)? The same would happen in an ICE car.

Surely we all know that as speed increases, the air resistance and rolling friction increases, requiring the engine/motor to work harder and consume more fuel/energy.

An EV's range is calculated using a standardised test cycle, simulating real-world driving conditions and not blasting down an autostrada at 80mph until the battery is empty.

**Geoff Turner**
**Via email**

*I would argue that driving at the speed limit absolutely constitutes 'real-world driving'. And high speed affects electric cars more significantly: the Ypsilon EV's city range is 339 miles but its combined range is only 250 miles. Drive the Ypsilon hybrid at high speeds and it loses only 8mpg from its combined figure – KC*

## Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

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New CEO reveals his vision – and it includes small EVs and sports cars

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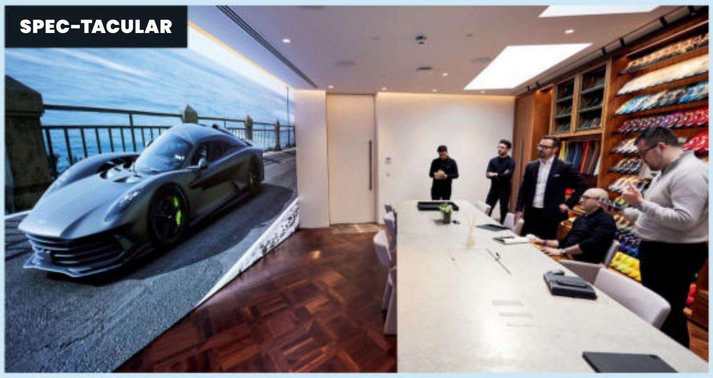

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We visit Aston Martin's HQ to select the dream spec for 'our' hypercar

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MY CAR & I

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It was the future once. An owner tells us how it stacks up in 2025

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Final verdict on petrol hot hatch after 6000 miles of everyday life

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# FIRST DRIVES

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## HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

**TESTED** 20.3.25, PORTO, PORTUGAL **DELIVERIES** MAY

# AUDI A6 AVANT

New platform, new hardware and new looks for next generation of combustion-engined big estate car

The future of estate cars may be in doubt at Volvo, but they still have a firm place in the range of that other known purveyor of them. Avant is an institution at Audi, to the extent that it's launching its latest A6 (that's the ICE one, not the unrelated electric one) as an estate first, with the saloon to follow later on.

Globally, just over half of A6s are specified as a saloon, but the estate dominates in Europe. Even so, its role has changed over the past five decades of A6 and 100 production. Today, buyers after a large, practical family car are more likely to pick an SUV. That leaves the A6 free to become more of a lifestyle product, one that puts more emphasis on style and driving dynamics.

For this C9-generation A6, the rear windscreen is notably sloped, not unlike an 100 Avant of the 1980s, and there's pronounced blistering to the wheel arches – Quattro, anyone? You will make up your own mind about the looks, but in the metal it looks rather sharp, I think.

The new A5 launched last year (to replace the A4) was a pleasant surprise, particularly in sporty S5 guise, and mechanically the A6 is effectively the same thing but bigger. It's based on the same new PPC platform with just a few spec differences.

That means the engines are still placed longitudinally, driving the front wheels in lower-end versions or all four in higher ones.

At launch, UK buyers can choose either a conventional 2.0-litre petrol or a 2.0-litre diesel with Audi's new MHEV Plus system, which puts a 24bhp electric motor on the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox and a 1.7kWh battery under the boot floor.

There's also a 3.0-litre V6 with the same hybrid system (the same powertrain as in the S5), but that won't be offered in the UK. The aggro around the $CO_2$ targets of the ZEV mandate didn't make it worth it, apparently. But don't despair: an S6, presumably powered by a more powerful V6, will be along shortly.

Naturally, a plug-in hybrid is on the way as well, supplementing the petrol four-cylinder with a 140bhp motor and a 20.7kWh battery. ▸

Sloping rear looks cool but restricts boot space. Back seats are roomy, though

**TESTER'S NOTE**

The ICE A6 was supposed to become the A7, like the A4 became the A5, but that whole strategy is now off the table, so instead it continues to be the A6, while the electric one is the A6 E-tron. **IV**

> **"It's not fun with a capital F, but it's well judged for a mainstream Audi"**

One mechanical difference from the A5 is that for £1755 you can specify air suspension on the A6. Otherwise it rides on passive suspension with steel coils in one of two flavours: softer on Sport cars, firmer on S Line and Edition 1 cars.

Inside, things look and feel very familiar from other recent Audis as well. The materials are slightly nicer than in the A5, with a bit more real metal and some softer plastics down low, but the style and general look is the same. That means it's very screen-heavy, with little in the way of physical buttons or anything overtly designery. It all works well enough but it does look a tad generic, and the smudge- and scratch-prone gloss black plastic centre console doesn't feel appropriate in this class of car.

No complaints about the seats or driving position, though, and the back is fairly roomy – more so than the BMW 5 Series Touring's.

Although the boot gets an array of nets and dividers that can be neatly stored under the floor, it's far from the biggest in the class, at 503 litres or 466 litres in the hybrids. It's even a bit smaller than the old A6 Avant's.

That will be the stylish 'lifestyle' estate aspect, so what about the dynamics? That really depends on which version you pick.

The bad news is that by far the nicest one is the V6 – the one we're not getting. While it doesn't feel like an S6 (the engine is too quiet and the chassis is too easy-going for that), an understressed many-cylinder engine is the way to go for effortless pace.

But forget about that. An easy second choice is the diesel, whose combination of low-down grunt and a bit of electric assistance manages to conjure an experience that's not entirely dissimilar, except with better fuel economy.

Slightly worryingly, though, Audi expects most A6s in the UK to be in four-cylinder petrol spec. This arguably needs the hybrid assistance more than the engines that actually do get it because, despite a healthy-sounding power figure of 201bhp, it's short of accessible torque. When asked for anything more than moderate acceleration, it becomes quite vocal. Without the torque fill of the electric motor, the gearbox isn't as smooth either. And even on a gentle run with plenty of motorway cruising, it struggled to better 30mpg.

The chassis, too, demands careful perusal of the options list. Basically, get the air suspension if you can. It doesn't give you the magic-carpet feel of some luxury cars but isolates you nicely and controls the body well.

The passive suspension doesn't impress as much. I only got to try the Comfort set-up, which feels weirdly floaty over undulations and crashy over rough roads. The Sport set-up might turn out to be more consistent and controlled but is unlikely to offer the kind of ride comfort you expect from a big exec.

In the corners, you wouldn't call this A6 fun with a capital F, but it has good balance and the well-weighted steering makes it quite satisfying. The front-driven petrol, with its lighter front end, is a shade keener on turn-in, while the Quattro versions feel slightly more positive when powering out. It's well judged for a mainstream Audi and bodes well for the S6 and RS6.

As usual in closely fought classes, pricing between rivals is pretty comparable. The petrol A6 in popular S Line trim is pretty much in line with the BMW 520i M Sport and a bit cheaper than the Mercedes E200 AMG Line. The diesel is within a few hundred pounds of the E220d but does throw in four-wheel drive.

German premium cars have always made buyers play the options game, but with this A6 the stakes are higher than usual. Get it right, though, and it's a good ambassador for estate cars: stylish, practical, good to drive and reasonably economical. Maybe send a couple to Gothenburg?

**ILLYA VERPRAET**

Driver sits comfortably but in a screen-heavy cabin lacking some flavour

**TECH SPEC**

## AUDI A6 AVANT TDI QUATTRO S LINE

Grumbles about the quality and design of its interior aside, Audi's new 5 Series rival is a well-rounded executive estate – in the right spec

**Price** £59,580
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1968cc, turbocharged, diesel, plus electric motor and ISG
**Power** 201bhp at 3800-4200rpm
**Torque** 295lb ft at 1750-3250rpm
**Gearbox** 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
**Kerb weight** 2000kg
**0-62mph** 7.0sec
**Top speed** 148mph
**Economy** 48.7mpg
**$CO_2$, tax band** 153g/km, 36%
**Rivals** BMW 520i Touring, Mercedes-Benz E220d Estate, Volvo V90 T6

**TESTED** 31.3.25, VALENCIA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** DECEMBER

# LEAPMOTOR C10 REEV

## Electric SUV turned range-extender

CHINA'S LEAPMOTOR ISN'T yet a well-known brand in Europe, but given that it has the powerhouse of Stellantis behind it, there's plenty to suggest that it can succeed here. We've already driven its T03 electric city car and C10 electric SUV, and by year's end the latter will gain a range-extender option in the UK.

In this new powertrain, badged REEV, a 1.5-litre petrol engine is used as a generator for a 28.4kWh battery that powers a 212bhp permanent magnet synchronous motor at the rear axle (and can also be plugged in to charge).

The benefits of such a system over a plug-in hybrid one, says Leapmotor, is better efficiency, better environmental credentials and an impressively long range – up to 90 miles using the electric motor only or 603 miles in total.

The starkest, most enjoyable difference compared with a PHEV is the continual smooth delivery of power purely through the motor and the related refinement, because the engine never drives the car's wheels. There is engine noise at times, but it's more mute than typical engine usage.

There's just one significant behavioural change required of the driver, and that's the need to adjust the powertrain modes. EV+ always prioritises the motor and the engine won't intervene until battery charge is below 9%. EV also prioritises the motor but brings in the engine below 25% charge. In Power+, the engine will always be on, delivering maximum power to the motor. And Fuel provides fully electric driving when charge is over 80% and works intelligently the rest of the time.

Overall, the C10 REEV is an easy drive: the light steering has little feel but is perfectly pleasant. It could feel more planted on the road, but only on the most pockmarked surfaces does it become noticeably jiggly. Comfort, meanwhile, is the best of three driving modes.

Agreeable to drive but not dynamic; we got 44mpg

There are a few flaws: everything is controlled through the large central touchscreen, which is undoubtedly distracting; the sat-nav is poor and there's no Apple CarPlay or Android Auto for you to use instead; and the ADAS functions are among the most over-sensitive and irritating I've come across.

Leapmotor has demonstrated fast deployment of over-the-air software updates to address issues already, and it says it will send out more in response to these criticisms.

Once it does, the C10 REEV will be a well-resolved model that has a fighting chance in the competitive mainstream large SUV segment.

**RACHEL BURGESS**

**TECH SPEC**

### LEAPMOTOR C10 REEV

A broadly well-resolved addition to the market, concerns about ADAS and other tech aside

**Price** £37,000 (est)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1499cc, petrol, plus electric motor
**Power** 212bhp
**Torque** 236lb ft
**Gearbox** 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
**Kerb weight** 1950kg
**0-62mph** 8.5sec
**Top speed** 106mph
**Battery** 28.4kWh
**Economy** 588mpg
**Range** 90 miles (EV), 603 miles (combined)
**$CO_2$, tax band** 10g/km, 6%
**Rivals** BYD Seal U, Jaecoo 7 SHS, MG HS PHEV

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**TESTED** 26.3.25, YOKOSUKA, JAPAN **DELIVERIES** SEPTEMBER

# NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER

## More poke, more MPG for hybrid

NISSAN IS PLOUGHING £2 billion into its Sunderland plant to prepare it to build the new Leaf and electric successors to the Juke and Qashqai. But with uncertainty surrounding EV uptake and regulations, it's yet to commit to an arrival date for the latter. Given the popularity of the segment-defining crossover, that's understandable caution. In the meantime, the firm is focused on improving the current Qashqai, including upgrading the e-Power hybrid version that arrived in 2022.

Nissan claims e-Power is a hybrid system born from EV technology, rather than a petrol powertrain that has been electrified. Instead of both power sources driving the wheels, only the electric motor does so, drawing power from a 1.8kWh battery charged by the 1.5-litre three-cylinder engine. It works the same way as the Leapmotor REEV but is a pure hybrid rather than a plug-in.

Nissan says its third-generation e-Power system (the first was only offered in Japan) benefits from significant upgrades. The engine is claimed to be a bespoke new unit. Although the basic architecture is unchanged, it has been remapped for its function as a generator, running more constantly at the most efficient RPM. And the motor is actually a new 'five-in-one unit' that combines the motor, generator, inverter, increaser and reverter into a single package, reducing its size and aiding efficiency.

The only changes to the Qashqai are under the skin

Power is up from 188bhp to 201bhp, with torque unchanged. More substantially, Nissan claims a 15% increase in fuel efficiency and a significant reduction in cabin noise (up to 5.6dBA) and vibrations.

We had an early taste in a Qashqai running a late prototype of the new system, driving it back to back with a current model. A few laps of Nissan's Grandrive test track in Japan offered no chance to judge any fuel economy improvement (which could boost official economy to around 60mpg) but did hint at the increased refinement.

It's subtle, though: as well as having a touch more pep, the engine is slightly quieter and, because it runs more constantly, less thrashy when you accelerate hard. It's a little smoother too. Just don't expect any added dynamism. Practical family motoring, this.

Quieter than before? I'd say so, although this e-Power hybrid still doesn't feel like a hushed EV. But, for now, subtle improvements are probably enough to keep the Qashqai success story rolling along.

**JAMES ATTWOOD**

**TECH SPEC**

### NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER PROTOTYPE

Subtle but welcome improvements should boost unusual hybrid's real-world liveability, especially if the promised efficiency is delivered

**Price** £33,000 (est)
**Engine** 3 cyls in line, 1498cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
**Power** 201bhp
**Torque** 243lb ft
**Gearbox** 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
**Kerb weight** 1612kg
**0-62mph** 8.5sec (est)
**Top speed** 105mph
**Economy** 60mpg (est)
**$CO_2$, tax band** na
**Rivals** Kia Sportage Hybrid, Toyota C-HR

**TESTER'S NOTE**
The Enyaq's upholstery is now more sustainable, with cloth made from recycled fishing nets, fabric scraps and old carpets, and leather dye originating from olive leaf extracts. **JB**

**TESTED** 26.3.25, BOHEMIA, CZECH REPUBLIC **DELIVERIES** MAY

# SKODA ENYAQ

## Efficiency gains and extended kit lists for new-look electric family SUV

The updated Enyaq is proof that some car makers are sticking with their core focuses even in the age of the rebrand. Kia and Hyundai have taken the 'reinvention' baton and run a country mile, and Jaguar's new look needs no introduction, but Skoda and its cars have stayed true to their intentions: they're easy on the eye, easy to use and easy to live with.

The firm's first bespoke EV, the Enyaq, has this inherent Skoda-ness in droves. It's an efficient, cleverly thought-out, affordable SUV that was one of Europe's best-selling cars last year and Skoda's third-best-seller in the UK. Now the Czechs are looking to enhance its appeal even further with a mid-life update.

The most obvious area of change is the styling. It's the latest Skoda to gain the brand's Tech-Deck face, which includes a new flush-fit front 'grille', a deeper and more chiselled front bumper, thin LED headlights and redesigned tail-lights.

The new face makes it slightly more aerodynamic than before, improving range a touch. Skoda says the new Enyaq Coupé (see right) is its most aerodynamic car yet.

Aside from this, the exterior design and its dimensions are the same as they were. This is no bad thing, because the Enyaq has always been spacious inside. Whether you go for the regular SUV or the Coupé, head room and leg room are plentiful and boot space is class-leading. The SUV offers 585 litres for cargo with the seats up and 1710 litres with them folded down, while the Coupé offers 570 and 1610 litres.

There's a more comprehensive list of standard equipment now, too. You get a new-look steering wheel that, along with the front seats, is heated as standard and tri-zone climate control.

The same 13in infotainment touchscreen and 5in digital gauge cluster are carried over, but the former has some clearer menu structures, sharper graphics and a faster processor for improved usability. Still, some additional buttons and the 'Smart Dials' from the new Kodiaq wouldn't go amiss.

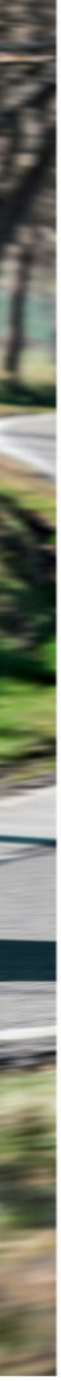
To drive, the Enyaq is pretty versatile. You get pleasant, assured-feeling steering on faster roads and a Mini Cooper-beating turning circle for urban manoeuvres (just 9.3m).

It helps, too, that outward and rearward visibility are good.

The urban ride is generally very settled, but uneven surfaces can cause it to fidget. We would recommend adding the optional adaptive dampers, as these make it exceptionally absorbent, allowing the body to dip and rise gradually on faster roads with long-wave undulations, giving the car a wafty quality that's very comfortable and satisfying on longer journeys.

And longer journeys you should be able to do. The entry-level Enyaq 60 comes with a 63kWh battery (59kWh usable capacity) that's good for up to 277 miles of range, while the 85 and dual-motor 85x use an 82kWh battery (77kWh usable) for ranges of up to 370 and 346 miles.

85 is as punchy as the dual-motor 85x, putting out 282bhp and 402lb ft



> **“It can be exceptionally absorbent, wafting very comfortably on motorways”**

**Refinement is its standout quality – ideal for a family car**

My 85 test car averaged a disappointing 3.1 miles per kWh on my drive across the Czech Republic, however, which equates to only around 240 miles of range.

Still, to get the best combination of range and performance, the 85 is the model to go for, being both the leggiest option and the fastest, with 282bhp and a brisk 0-62mph time of 6.7sec – figures only matched by the four-wheel-drive 85x.

The 60, which uses a 201bhp motor to reach 62mph in 8.1sec, can’t replicate the apparent effortlessness of the 85 and 85x.

Much more than the performance of the Enyaq, however, it’s the refinement that impresses most. Beyond some minor wind flutter from the large door mirrors and chunky A-pillars, the cabin is very hushed. This applies at pretty much any speed, no doubt helped by the marginally lower drag coefficient granted by the exterior redesign.

It’s these cosseting driving dynamics, the extra equipment, the interior spaciousness and the highly usable infotainment system that put the Enyaq in as good a position to succeed as ever, especially since the new car is priced no higher than the previous one.

While it’s a shame we couldn’t coax better energy efficiency out of our 85 test car, this remains a very compelling choice in the class.
**JONATHAN BRYCE**

**TECH SPEC**

### SKODA ENYAQ 85 EDITION

As refined and polished as ever but with more equipment and an extra dose of all-round usability

**Price** £44,300
**Engine** Permanent magnet synchronous motor
**Power** 282bhp
**Torque** 402lb ft
**Gearbox** 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
**Kerb weight** 2304kg
**0-62mph** 6.7sec
**Top speed** 112mph
**Battery** 82/77kWh (total/usable)
**Range, economy** 370 miles, 4.0mpkWh
**$CO_2$, tax band** 0g/km, 3%
**Rivals** Hyundai Ioniq 5, Volkswagen ID 4

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**TESTED** 26.3.25, BOHEMIA, CZECH REPUBLIC **DELIVERIES** MAY

# SKODA ENYAQ COUPE

## Swoopier version tested with 4WD

SKODA CLAIMS THE new Enyaq Coupé is the most aerodynamic car it has ever made, and in its ultimate form it’s also one of its most potent.

The 85x gets a combined 282bhp from two electric motors – one on the rear axle and a smaller, asynchronous unit on the front for four-wheel-drive running.

Straight off the bat, it feels slightly more planted and assured to drive than rear-driven Enyaqs, and its healthy 402lb ft of torque is delivered without any drama.

Once you’re up to speed, the Coupé is almost as quiet as the regular SUV. Almost: strangely, we heard a little more wind noise, especially above 60mph. That said, it’s a subtle difference and not something you’re likely to notice unless you’re listening out for it.

Interior space is slightly different from the SUV, too. There’s 105mm less head room in the front. It stays the same in the rear. Either row is still spacious enough for six-footers, though, and the panoramic roof doesn’t eat up as much room as in some other cars.

With the rear seats up, boot space is 15 litres down on the SUV, at 585 litres. Lower them and you have 1610 litres at your disposal, 100 litres less than in the SUV. Yet this still beats all major rivals with more conventional bodystyles, such as the Volkswagen ID 4 and Hyundai Ioniq 5.

**Sloped roofline will really only affect taller drivers**

The Enyaq Coupé also leads the way on official economy, promising 3.9mpkWh from its 82kWh battery. The equivalent Kia EV6 (84kWh) and Nissan Ariya (87kWh) both get around 3.5mpkWh.

During my test drive, however, my 85x Sportline, like the lower-trim SUV (see left), returned only 3.1mpkWh from the mixed-roads route, which would translate to a range well below the 347 miles claimed by Skoda.

So it’s worth thinking carefully about whether you really have use for four-wheel drive in your Enyaq Coupé (or indeed your Enyaq SUV). Unless you drive regularly in remote, snowy, hilly places, you might be better off with the regular rear-driven 85 Coupé, which provides 21 miles of extra range and exactly the same performance for £4450 less.
**JONATHAN BRYCE**

**TECH SPEC**

### SKODA ENYAQ 85X SPORTLINE COUPE

Still accomplished, spacious and practical even with a sloping roof. The addition of four-wheel drive will suit only certain use cases

**Price** £50,650
**Engine** Asynchronous motor (f), permanent magnet synchronous motor (r)
**Power** 282bhp
**Torque** 402lb ft
**Gearbox** 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
**Kerb weight** 2362kg
**0-62mph** 6.7sec
**Top speed** 112mph
**Battery** 82/77kWh (total/usable)
**Range, economy** 347 miles, 3.9mpkWh
**$CO_2$, tax band** 0g/km, 3%
**Rivals** Kia EV6, Nissan Ariya, Tesla Model Y

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5738

# JAECOO 7

Chery's SUV brand hits the UK with a family PHEV that's big on value

**MODEL TESTED**
**JAECOO 7 SHS 2WD LUXURY**
**Price** £35,065
**Power** 201bhp
**Torque** 229lb ft
**0-60mph** 7.3sec
**30-70mph** 6.4sec
**Top speed** 112mph (claimed)
**Average economy** 42.0mpg
**Electric range** 41 miles
**$CO_2$ emissions** 23g/km
**70-0mph** 45.4m (8deg C, dry)

The car under scrutiny in this road test extends the number of Chinese-built and Chinese-branded, budget-priced, plug-in hybrid, family-sized SUVs competing for attention in the UK to three.

That may not sound like the most extensive selection. In fact, it's barely worth coining a collective noun for (though feel free, if you're so inclined). And yet, when you look at what most European brands offer with cars like this in comparison and how much they expect to charge, you realise in an instant how serious these Asian brands are about making significant inroads into UK market share – and how well placed, on the face of things, they seem to be to make them.

The Jaecoo 7, then, is here to lock horns with the at least fairly well-established MG HS PHEV and the slightly less well-known but well-backed BYD Seal U DM-i. It's out to earn the favour of private and fleet buyers alike, who see no reason why they shouldn't be able to get a family-sized, plug-in hybrid car for the sort of money that certainly wouldn't buy them such a vehicle in very many other showrooms.

This car will be available as a conventional petrol-powered option as well, for less outlay still. However, it's the PHEV version that the company behind it – Chinese manufacturing giant Chery, which also owns and operates the Omoda brand – expects to account for the greater part of the sales mix.

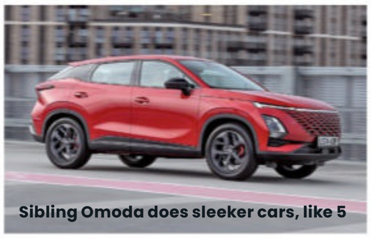
## DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★☆☆

**PROS** Not punitively heavy; reasonable power and performance for the money
**CONS** Deeply derivative looks; electric range lags a little behind its competitors

While its sibling brand Omoda focuses on sleeker-looking crossovers, Jaecoo – whose name is a portmanteau of 'Jaeger', the German word for hunter or soldier, and, rather nauseatingly, 'cool' – will focus on more versatile, rugged and capable SUVs. Or so we are told.

Its debut model, the 7, can be had with part-time four-wheel drive as a conventional petrol variant, and the car's 200mm of ground clearance and 600mm wading depth do indeed beat at least some mid-sized SUVs. But if Chery wanted to make a statement about the capability and ruggedness of its new Jaecoo brand, leading with a plug-in hybrid model that is resolutely front-wheel drive only, in a niche where at least one PHEV opponent does offer four driven wheels, seems a slightly odd choice.



Sibling Omoda does sleeker cars, like 5

But that choice keeps the Jaecoo 7 at least reasonably light, simple and efficient, of course. This is a 4.5m-long, five-seat SUV sized roughly like a Nissan Qashqai or Kia Sportage, though it is styled to ape premium SUVs – most notably, the Range Rover Evoque and Velar. It's a simplistic tactic and for some it might well prove effective enough, but others tend to double-take with a mix of puzzlement and incredulity when they see the car.

Both conventional petrol and PHEV models use transversely mounted four-cylinder engines. The petrol version employs a 1.6-litre turbocharged unit with 145bhp going to the front wheels via a standard seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

But the PHEV adopts Chery's fifth-generation SHS (Super Hybrid System), which it rather immodestly acclaims as the most thermally efficient hybrid powertrain in the world. At its heart is a 1.5-litre turbocharged petrol engine running on the Miller combustion cycle. This unit is hooked up to the wheels via Chery's own CVT-style hybrid transmission and in parallel with the car's main permanent magnet synchronous drive motor, for a total system output of 201bhp and 229lb ft.

Electric current for the powertrain is stored in a lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) drive battery of 18.3kWh total capacity, for a claimed electric range of 56 miles.

The car's chassis and suspension are pretty class-typical: steel monocoque, and MacPherson struts at the front and multiple links at the rear, with coil springs and conventional anti-roll bars all round. Our test car weighed 1814kg on the proving ground scales, which is within 20kg of its claimed kerb weight, and the weight was distributed 58% over the front and 42% over the rear.

## INTERIOR

★★★☆☆

**PROS** Roomy cabin; quietly impressive quality for the money
**CONS** Boot is small by class standards; lack of physical secondary controls erodes usability

The Jaecoo 7 is a fairly practical and well-packaged mid-sized family SUV, except in one particular area.

The driving position is higher than in some cars of this kind. The driver's seat itself feels a bit flat and lacks useful cushion angle adjustment, and the steering column is likewise a little short on telescopic reach adjustment. On both accounts, longer-legged drivers aren't catered to terrifically well here, although none of our testers found it impossible to achieve a comfortable driving position ultimately.

Headlight design is very contemporary, with lower-set lights for dipped and high beam than the 'feature' daytime-running lights. Inset foglights look like a bit of an afterthought, though.

There's a hint of the 1980s sci-fi blockbuster about the font that displays Jaecoo's brand name on the bootlid. Could that be Robocop at the wheel? Nope, but he'd certainly do a better job than the automatic lane keeping.

The car is available in both Deluxe and Luxury trim levels, the former in combination with a conventional petrol engine only. Wider test experience has taught us that in that lower-tier trim, the 7's cabin comes across as a little plain and feels cheap in places. With an SHS Luxury model, however, there's a modicum of richness to the car's fascia panels, air vent fixtures and minor switchgear, which ensures that any real semblance of austerity or cheapness is avoided.

A digital instrument screen and head-up display sit in front of the driver and a 14.8in portrait-oriented multimedia touchscreen dominates an otherwise sparsely turned-out dashboard and centre stack. There is one line of only the most basic physical switchgear. For almost everything else – including heating and ventilation control, door mirror adjustment and more – you must dive into the screen's various menus.

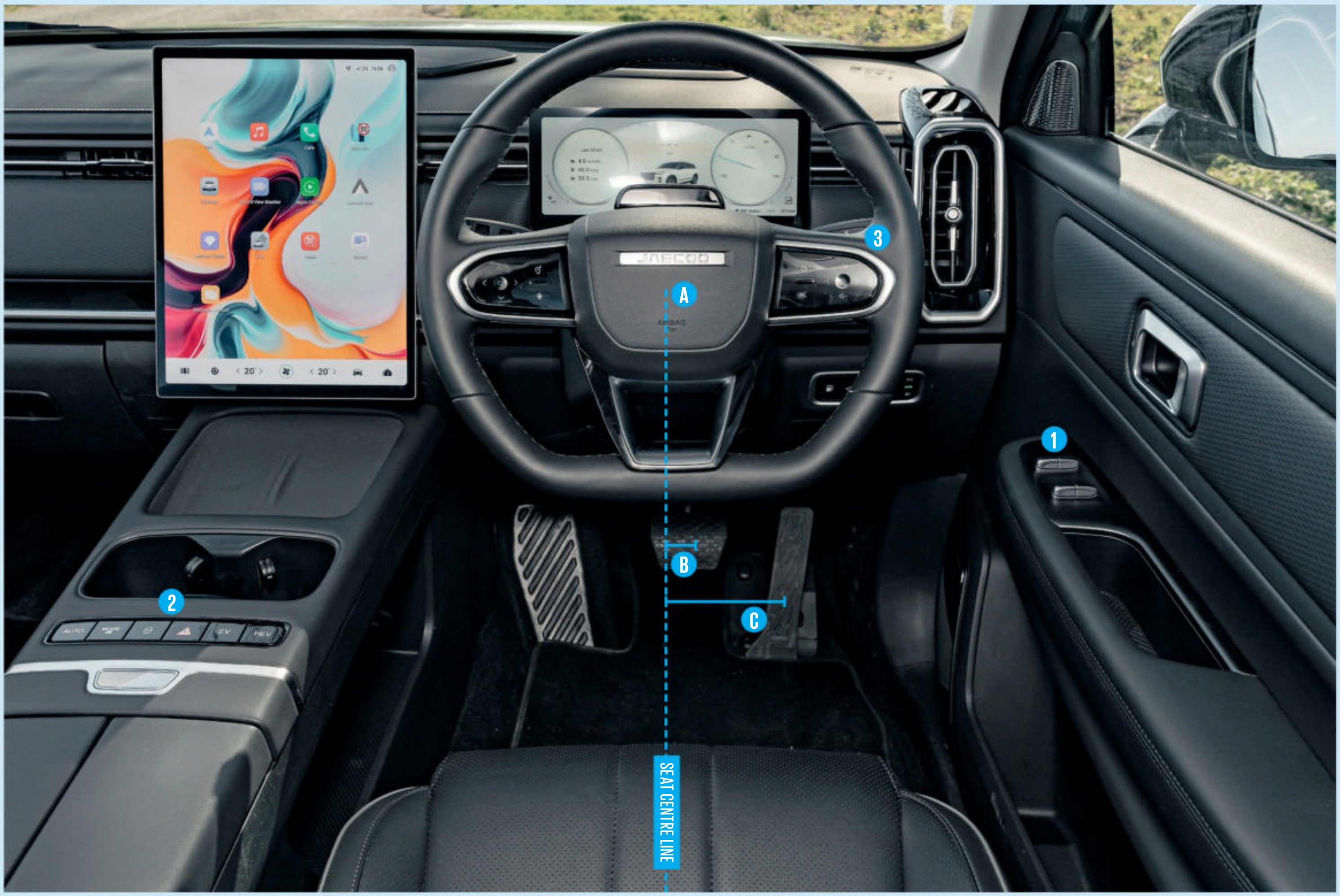
Second-row occupant space is pretty respectable (typical rear leg room of 750mm is identical to that of a Kia Sportage, which the Jaecoo beats for head room). But boot space is the key disappointment: it's a fairly shallow cargo bay by SUV standards and there isn't much usable underfloor space, though ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

① Electric window switches have some material glitz but seem to our testers to work counterintuitively. Push them forward to lower the glass; pull them back to raise it again.

② There's scant switchgear – just this row of buttons for powertrain mode, hazards and door lock/unlock. The heater controls aren't even permanently displayed on the central screen.

③ Drive selector moves from the centre console, where it sits on petrol models, to the column for the PHEV. It often needs a second nudge to engage drive or reverse.



**WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT** Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 20mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 160mm right. Pedal positioning is sound and the footwell roomy. This doesn't excuse a brake pedal that can often grab at manoeuvring speeds, though.

◂ it would still offer more capacity than most bigger hatchbacks with the roller cover removed and loaded above the window line.

## MULTIMEDIA

★★☆☆☆

**PROS** Big, portrait screen makes for sensibly sized screen icons; smartphone-mirroring connection is reliable; cooled device charging
**CONS** Poor usability entails lots of separate menus and long lists; touchscreen climate controls disappear in Apple CarPlay; poor DAB radio reception

The 14.8in upright touchscreen in the Jaecoo 7 looks a lot like a mid-range tablet PC that has been plonked onto the middle of the dashboard – and it's much the same to use. There are long and complex menu structures that seem to demand as much of your attention as a regular tablet might and its left-sided list navigation isn't easy to reach from the right side of the cabin.

The screen has very few permanently displayed controls, so most processes require three, four or five inputs. Even simple tasks such as adjusting the door mirrors or turning up the air conditioning distract you more than they might, especially since the car's screen-borne heater controls are only visible when you switch out of Apple CarPlay mode – which we spent a lot of time using because the car's native software isn't very good.

Our Luxury-grade test car did offer factory navigation but needed an app download, the registration of personal information and the input of both the engine and chassis numbers to activate it, so we used Apple CarPlay for navigation, which was reliable though it was not easy to switch back and forth with the native menu software.

## PERFORMANCE

★★★☆☆

**PROS** Assertive and responsive around town and in traffic; quiet and refined in both pure-electric and hybrid running
**CONS** Grabby brake pedal; misleading range instrumentation

Among the strengths of the Jaecoo 7's petrol-electric powertrain, we can certainly credit good mechanical isolation, fairly strong and seamless accelerator response, and good urban efficiency (to which we'll come shortly).

It behaves more like a series-hybrid arrangement at low speeds than a parallel one. The car negotiates town roads as though it were entirely electric, with the combustion engine remaining disconnected from the drive wheels and running only to generate current as needed.

Plenty of performance is on tap even without direct piston power. The proof of that came during our recorded standing start acceleration runs when, even under full throttle, the moment at which the combustion engine fully connected to the driving wheels, above 50mph, could clearly be felt.

In its slightly mysterious way, then, the Jaecoo 7 SHS got to 62mph from rest in 7.7sec, 0.8sec sooner than the claims said it should. It never felt sluggish or flustered, even during motorway driving, and it remained fairly refined even with its piston engine running hard in the background.

There are a great many driving modes to tinker with – almost certainly more than there need be. You can run the car in EV or HEV modes, the former only when there's enough charge in the battery. In HEV, you can choose between Initial, Smart and Forced hybrid running regimes. Initial prioritises electric running until the battery's flat; Forced allows you to pick a battery charge percentage for the hybrid system to maintain; and Smart lets the car decide how much charge to maintain in its drive battery based on various inputs.

With all of those modes, however, the car will almost always protect an indicated baseline battery charge level of about 15% to 20%. In practice, this means that while the instruments will tell you there's still somewhere between eight and 12 miles of electric range left to use, the hybrid system won't actually let you access them. Not, that is, until you find the EV+ driving mode hidden away on another touchscreen menu, which opens up those last few miles but which, a warning message advises, “is only to be used in emergency situations”.

So what would otherwise be fairly simple top-level drivability in the Jaecoo 7 is rendered rather complicated and ultimately a little frustrating. The company would do much better to simply forget the EV+ mode, recalibrate the car’s electric range instrumentation and give the driver unfettered access to whatever really usable EV range remains – as most PHEV manufacturers do.

## RIDE & HANDLING

★★⯨☆☆

**PROS** No major, conspicuous dynamic failings

**CONS** Wooden out-of-town ride; shortage of traction when accelerating out of bends

It’s the habit of new entrants into the European car market to seek to reassure buyers about the quality of their wares with mention of technical centres in Germany and of extensive programmes of suspension and steering development on the roads of our continent.

Chery does indeed have such a centre itself (in Frankfurt), where this car and the recent Omoda 5 were supposedly finished and fine-tuned. Yet even so, when we tested the Omoda 5 late last year, it fell some way short of the dynamic sophistication you would expect of a European-developed car in a few notable areas. And, in its own different ways and perhaps by a narrower margin, the Jaecoo 7 does as well.

This, broadly speaking, is a fairly competent, comfortable and predictable car to drive. It has a medium-soft ride; medium-light steering; grip levels that narrowly exceed the bounds of the adequate without straying much further; and body control that allows it to remain reasonably secure and contained at typical UK road speeds without providing much that will interest its driver.

So much is about what you would expect for this type of car. And if the Jaecoo 7 did all that without the hint of woodenness that frequently causes its ride to fidget – or perhaps with a little more traction and composure to spare, or greater precision or tactile feel through the steering – it might create at least some dynamic identity or otherwise escape the pervading sense of anonymity that characterises it.

As it is, though, the Jaecoo 7 is a broadly inoffensive if bland and unenticing car to drive.

## ASSISTED DRIVING

★⯨☆☆☆

**PROS** You can turn it all off ultimately

**CONS** All systems default to on every time you get in; intrusive driver monitoring; meddlesome lane keeping

The Jaecoo 7 has the kind of ADAS functions that you’re very unlikely to forget to disable once you’ve sampled them – even if that means delaying every journey by 30 seconds and toggling them off one by one on the car’s lengthy assistance screen checklist, before engaging drive.

The driver monitoring system is irritatingly over-sensitive about the direction of your gaze and the active lane keeping system fights you for fine control of lane positioning when it’s active but drops out much too often to be worth using at all.

Add in extra bonging from the speed governance system and you could easily be driven to distraction within a few short miles. This is not what driver assistance should feel like – and nor has the accessibility of the controls while driving really been spared a thought.

## BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯨☆

**PROS** Good value; efficient around town

**CONS** Not the very cheapest of its breed; touring economy is only average

The Jaecoo 7 has a sizeable value advantage over equivalent plug-in hybrid SUVs from most European brands and few people would disagree that it’s a biggish car with an efficient and advanced hybrid system for a reasonable price. It is, however, pricier than the equivalent MG HS and roughly equalled on value by its opposite-number BYD Seal U – and both of those rivals have bigger drive batteries and better electric range.

However, the Jaecoo hits back with particularly impressive urban efficiency. Our test car averaged 68.0mpg on our low-speed everyday efficiency test. We had to work that out using a fairly obscure – but, thankfully, resettable – indication of overall fuel used that’s buried within the car’s infotainment system, though. That’s because, for some reason, the Jaecoo 7 doesn’t have a conventional, resettable trip computer.

Instead, it displays a rolling 50km indication of recent efficiency for both the electric and combustion elements of the hybrid system, which would be at least a little useful if the data it conveyed weren’t so laughably inaccurate. On our test car, the ‘mpkWh’ electric efficiency routinely indicated in excess of 1000 and yet the ‘mpg’ petrol efficiency indicator seemed incapable of rising beyond 60 and frequently declined to improve even during extended engine-off running.

We can only hope this was a software calibration glitch particular to our test car. If not, an efficient family car should certainly be better able to give itself due credit in one of the few places where it’s genuinely deserved. ▸

**FRONT** Leg room 1070mm, head room 970mm. The cushions are a little flat and the driving position is slightly upright but it’s comfortable enough.

**REAR** Leg room 750mm, head room 950mm. There’s as much leg room as in a Sportage, and more head room, so adults can be made comfortable.

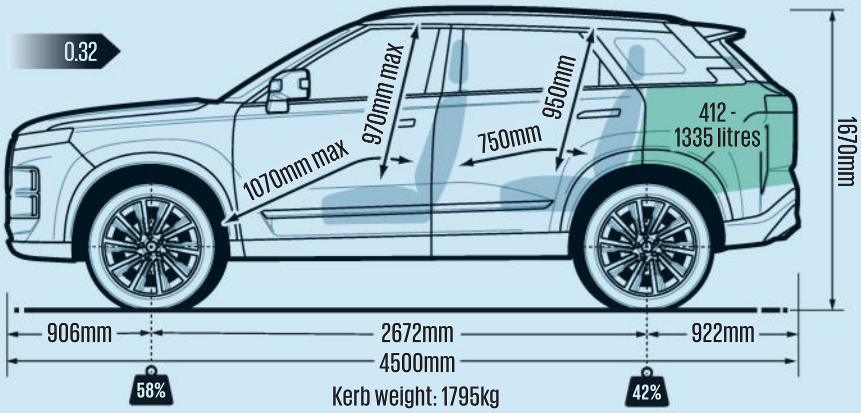
**BOOT** Length 850-1620mm, width 970-1150mm, height 350-700mm. Boot is shallower and smaller than is typical for the class, with some side intrusion.

“Plenty of performance is on tap even without piston power”

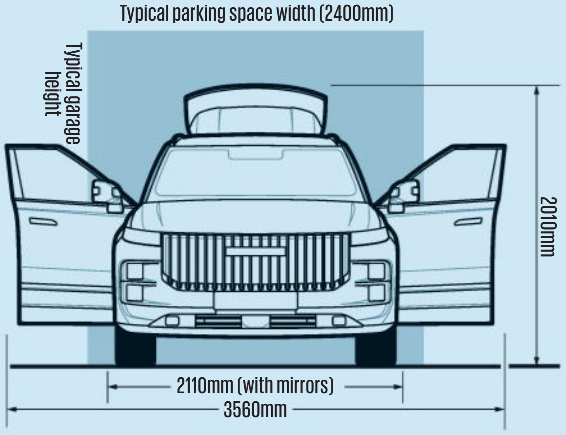
JAECOO
LL74 YLT

# TEST RESULTS

## DIMENSIONS


0.32
970mm max
950mm
750mm
1070mm max
412 - 1335 litres
1670mm
906mm
2672mm
922mm
4500mm
58%
42%
Kerb weight: 1795kg

## PARKING

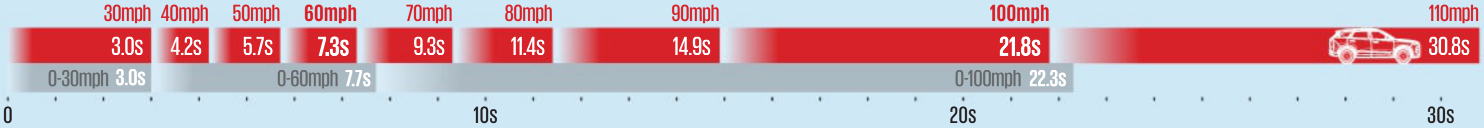

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2010mm
2110mm (with mirrors)
3560mm

## ACCELERATION

▨ Acceleration at <10% charge

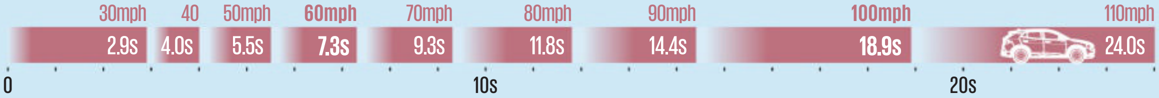
**Test conditions** 8deg C, dry

**Standing quarter mile** 15.7sec at 91.8mph **Standing km** 29.0sec at 108.2mph **30-70mph** 6.4sec **50-80mph** 5.7sec **0-62mph** 7.7sec



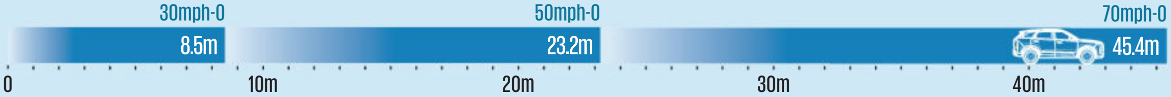
**Kia Sportage 1.6 HEV GT-Line S** (2022, 10deg C, dry)

**Standing quarter mile** 15.6sec at 92.2mph **Standing km** 28.3sec at 114.9mph **30-70mph** 6.4sec **50-80mph** 6.3sec

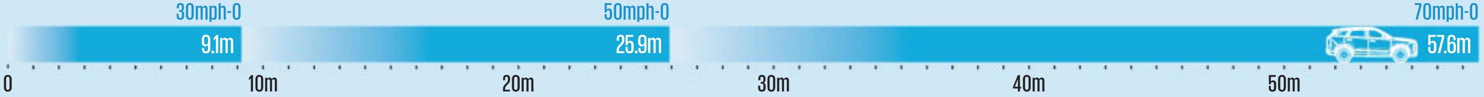


## BRAKING

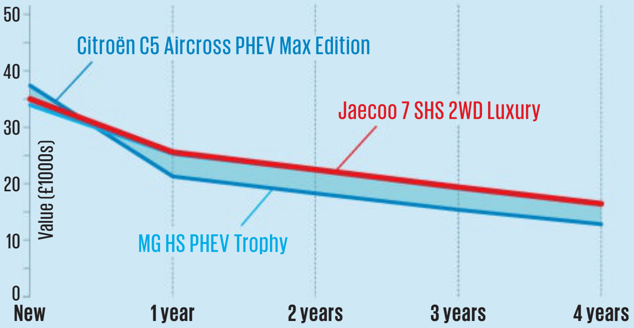
**Dry 60-0mph** 2.52sec



**Wet 60-0mph** 2.82sec

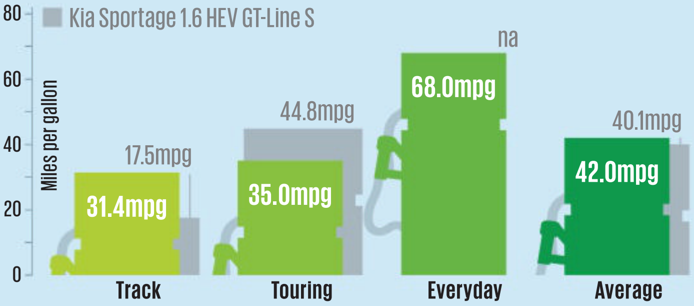


## DEPRECIATION

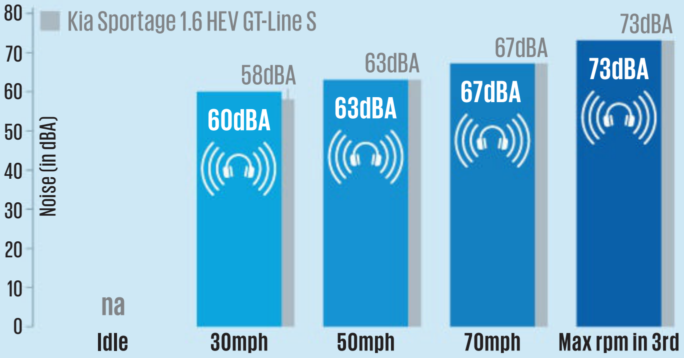


## RUNNING EFFICIENCY

**WLTP** 403.0mpg (combined) **Test range** 595/503/938 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** 41 miles

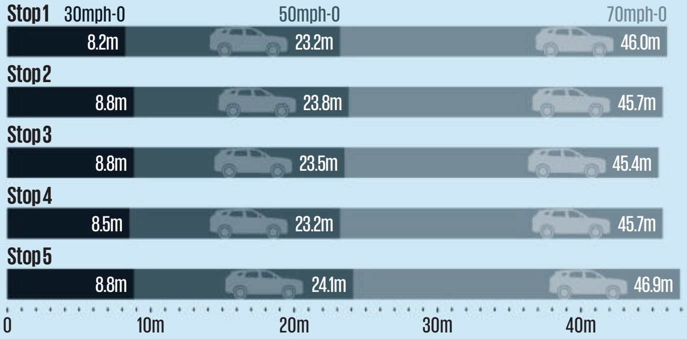


## CABIN NOISE



## BRAKING ENDURANCE

**Fade variance** 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 0.9m



PETER LIDDIARD

**THE SMALL PRINT** Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the Jaecoo 7, contact Omoda & Jaecoo UK Ltd, Customer Services, 280 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M 4AG (0808 175 8787, jaecoo.co.uk).

## MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

### JAECOO 7 SHS 2WD LUXURY

**On-the-road price** £35,065
**Price as tested** £35,665
**Value after 3yrs/36k miles** £19,375
**Contract hire** £290 pcm (£1740 deposit + 36 months/ 30,000 miles, excluding VAT)
**Typical PCP** £409 pcm (£3912 deposit + 48 months/ 32,000 miles)
**Insurance group** 31

### FITTED EQUIPMENT

**Standard** 19in alloy wheels, full-length panoramic sunroof, roof rails, laminated front and side windows, electric and heated front seats, 14.8in portrait LCD touchscreen, Sony eight-speaker premium audio, heated steering wheel, head-up display
**Optional** Metallic paint, Amazonite Blue £600

### HYBRID POWERTRAIN

**Engine** Front, transverse, FWD
**Type** 4 cyls in line, 1499cc, turbocharged, petrol; 141bhp, 161lb ft
**Motor** Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted
**Battery type** LFP
**Capacity** 18.3/15.0kWh (total/usable)
**Total power** 201bhp
**Total torque** 229lb ft
**Power to weight** 112bhp per tonne
**Torque to weight** 128lb ft per tonne

### GEARBOX

**Type** e-CVT

### CHASSIS & BODY

**Construction** Steel monocoque
**Weight/as tested** 1795kg/1814kg
**Weight distribution (f/r)** 58%/42%
**Drag coefficient** 0.32
**Wheels** 8.0Jx19in
**Tyres** 235/50 R19 103V, Kumho Ecsta PS71
**Spare** None (mobility foam)

### SUSPENSION & STEERING

**Front** MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
**Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
**Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 10.6m turning circle

### BRAKES

**Front** 316mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers
**Rear** 314mm solid discs, floating calipers
**Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

### SAFETY

**Euro NCAP rating** Not tested

### EMISSIONS & TAX

**$CO_2$** 23g/km
**BIK at 20/40% pcm** £53/£105

# VERDICT

## Efficient, keenly priced, but too many usability flaws

★★⯪☆☆

The Jaecoo 7 is a more competent and complete family car than many might expect from a brand they've never heard of. For those seeking a family-friendly budget PHEV, it might be worth a test drive.

But unless you have extraordinary patience, it's likely to be the shortest test drive you've taken. If you're like us, you'll notice that the car is efficient, quite refined and digitally well equipped for the money. And also that it's so irksome, distracting and poorly calibrated with much of that same digital technology, and with so many other rather careless elements of its fine-tuning, that your faith in the integrity of the product as a whole will be seriously undermined.

The Jaecoo 7 is also almost entirely flavourless to drive – which, among a set of increasingly insipid modern electrified SUVs, is saying something.

## TESTERS' NOTES

**RICHARD LANE**
The column-mounted drive selector almost always takes two or three stabs on the wand to get from drive to reverse, or back, every time you need to manoeuvre. Irritating at first, maddening on occasion seven - or, I dare say, 177.

**MATT SAUNDERS**
This car's digital technology is so bad that it fails even to provide a normal odometer. For some unfathomable reason, the one you get only counts the miles covered in HEV hybrid running mode. Just be wary if you buy - or sell - a second-hand one.

## FACELIFT FIXES

- Recalibrate the EV range instrumentation; junk EV+ driving mode.
- Sort out the infotainment system's layout, adding more useful shortcuts.
- Give us a dual-motor, four-wheel-drive one.

## RANKING RIVALS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| | **MG HS 1.5 T-GDi PHEV SE**<br>Lots of space and electric range, plenty of poke and a winning price. The king of cheap PHEVs. | **CITROEN C5 AIRCROSS PHEV MAX EDITION**<br>Best-value European option. Spacious and comfy but 36-mile EV range hurts BIK tax. | **BYD SEAL U DM-i COMFORT**<br>Claimed 77-mile electric range catches the eye; soft and soggy handling lets it down a bit. | **NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER ACENTA PREMIUM**<br>UK-built option not a PHEV but frugal and simple for those who can't plug in easily. | **DACIA BIGSTER HYBRID JOURNEY**<br>Hybrid version of new big Dacia promises unfussy short-hop efficiency for less. UK verdict soon. |
| | ★★★★☆ | ★★★⯪☆ | ★★★⯪☆ | ★★★⯪☆ | |
| **Price** | £31,495 | £37,425 | £35,150 | £34,165 | £29,245 |
| **Power, torque** | 295bhp, 258lb ft | 221bhp, 221lb ft | 215bhp, 221lb ft | 188bhp, 184lb ft | 154bhp, na |
| **0-62mph, top speed** | 6.8sec, 105mph | 8.2sec, 140mph | 8.9sec, 105mph | 7.9sec, 105mph | 9.7sec, 112mph |
| **$CO_2$, economy** | 12g/km, 565mpg | 33g/km, 149-221mpg | 9g/km, 706.8mpg | 117g/km, 54.3mpg | 106g/km, 58mpg |

**AUTOCAR** **ROAD TEST 5739**

# RANGE ROVER

## Does six-pot PHEV power suit the remit of this updated luxury off-roader?

In the final reckoning the 'L460' will go down as one of the more radical generations of Range Rover. The monolithic exterior still turns heads four years on, with an almost pebble-smooth look that combines to striking effect with simply enormous body panels, while the L460 is the model that has taken electrification mainstream for the world's best-known luxury off-roader.

Mild hybridisation is now table stakes for both petrol and diesel Range Rovers, and the former is also available in PHEV guise. Its pioneering role isn't over yet, either. Later this year JLR will launch the first pure-electric Range Rover, which has been seen hot-weather testing on 250ft sand dunes in the UAE's Al Badayer desert in Sharjah. Resilience in high temperatures is a key challenge of the project, as is an all-new traction management system to replace the traditional ABS-based set-up.

An electric Range Rover should be a game-changing proposition in the luxury SUV segment. In advance of this car's arrival, JLR has lightly facelifted its flagship across the range, with new powertrains and alterations to the cabin. Here we test the plug-in hybrid P550e, three years on from our full road test of the diesel D350, which we rather liked. Does PHEV power suit the big Rangie? Let's find out.

### DESIGN & ENGINEERING

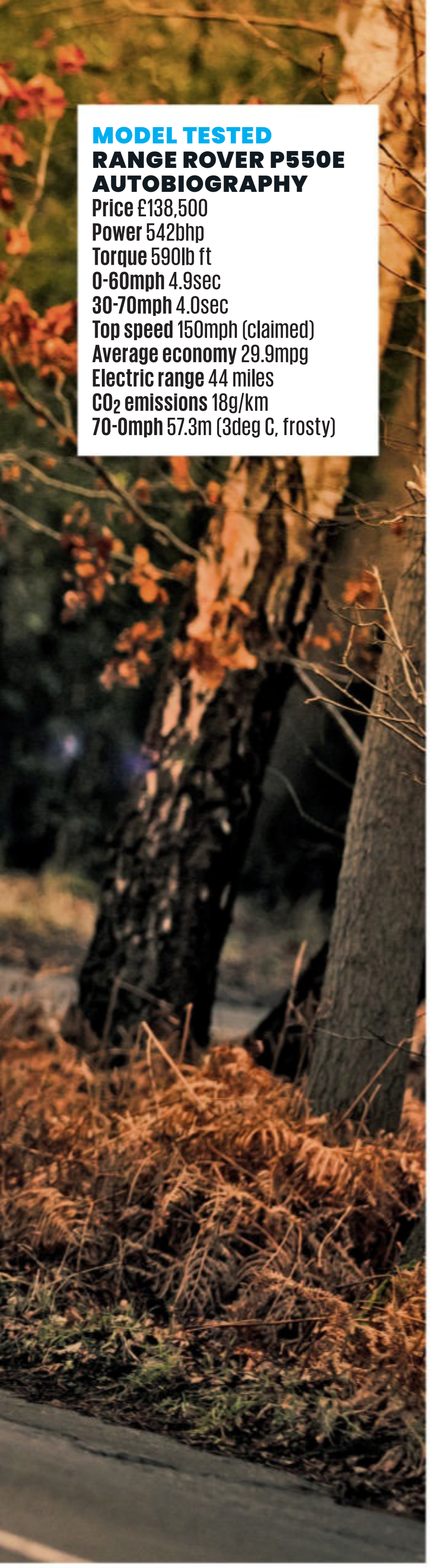
★★★★☆

**PROS** Wears its huge proportions well; appreciably serious chassis
**CONS** PHEV weighs nearly three tonnes in running order

With no fundamental changes to speak of, the Range Rover continues to use the aluminium-intensive MLA-Flex platform, which was designed from the outset with hybrid and full-electric variants in mind. Air suspension is also deployed as standard, giving the car an enormous spread of ride heights that range from 135mm above the default setting (for off-roading) to 50mm below it (for easy cabin access). Active anti-roll bars and rear-axle steering are standard issue, the latter shrinking the turning circle of this 5052mm-long SUV to just 11.4m wall to wall.

When we tested the D350 in 2022, there was a rather bewildering selection of powertrains to choose from, and that remains the case. We're not complaining, though. Whether you need a long-distance family chariot, a tax-efficient option or something with which to hang onto the coat-tails of the latest super-saloons, the Range Rover would seem to have you covered.

The meekest option is the D300 diesel mild hybrid, with 296bhp, but things escalate quickly from there. At launch, the fruitiest Range Rover was the V8-fired P530, although its

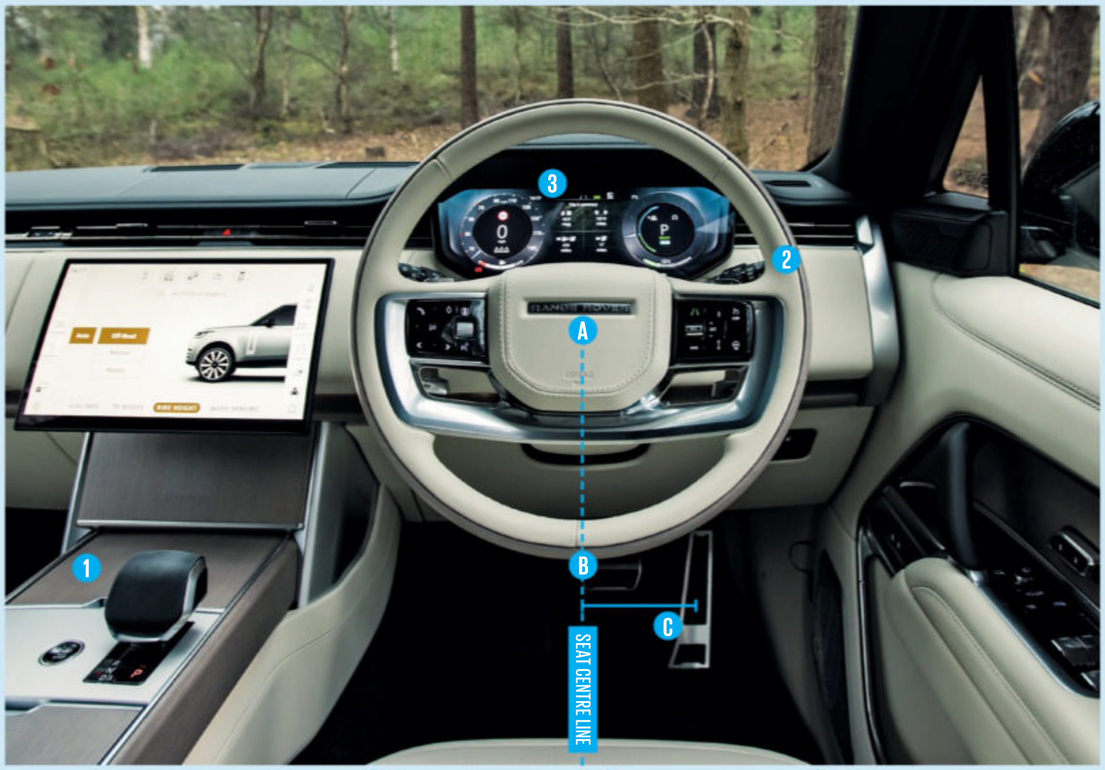


**MODEL TESTED**
**RANGE ROVER P550E AUTOBIOGRAPHY**
**Price** £138,500
**Power** 542bhp
**Torque** 590lb ft
**0-60mph** 4.9sec
**30-70mph** 4.0sec
**Top speed** 150mph (claimed)
**Average economy** 29.9mpg
**Electric range** 44 miles
**$CO_2$ emissions** 18g/km
**70-0mph** 57.3m (3deg C, frosty)

① Switches on the centre console have been pared back with the removal of the pre-facelift car's all-terrain mode switch, volume roundel and climate controls.

② The steering wheel's rim remains sumptuously slim. It's a thing British marques do well – a Rolls Phantom is the same. Outer wood trim – it's an SV-spec option – feels lovely.

③ Digital dash has had a minor reskin. It's sharp enough but still not that easy to navigate using the capacitive steering wheel controls. Trad roundels are nice.



**WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT** Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 0mm Ⓒ Accelerator offset 140mm right. A big central brake is an RR hallmark, with good spacing to the throttle, in case you're wearing wellies.

523bhp total is today eclipsed by the 542bhp PHEV P550e six-cylinder petrol we have here. The flagship slot is now occupied by the P615, a 607bhp twin-turbocharged V8 model that wears SV badging but otherwise doesn't flaunt its Herculean reserves of power.

The P550e and its understudy, the P460e, both use a 38.2kWh battery pack that lives under the boot floor (and yields only 31.8kWh of usable capacity), and it supplies a gearbox-integrated electric motor that is good for 215bhp. That looks like a generous figure, but remember that it alone is required to drive the car in EV mode, right up to motorway speeds. It's no small ask when you consider the 2735kg kerb weight – a figure that swelled to 2979kg on the weighbridge at Horiba MIRA. It translates to a power-to-weight ratio of 79bhp per tonne, which is about what you got from a middle-ranking Ford Fiesta of the late 1990s. When bolstered by the 395bhp single twin-scroll turbo 3.0-litre straight six, however, which is also boosted by an electrically spooled supercharger, the resulting output ratio is a far healthier 198bhp per tonne.

Whichever powertrain you opt for – petrol, diesel, MHEV or PHEV, six or eight cylinders – drive is sent through a ZF eight-speed torque converter, which is just as before. Downstream of that is a centre differential and, on the rear axle, an electronically locking limited-slip diff. Land Rover's Terrain Response II continues to offer driveline settings for a range of surfaces by manipulating the distribution of drive via the behaviour of the differentials and brake-based torque vectoring. There's also a low-range transfer box, if you need it.

## INTERIOR

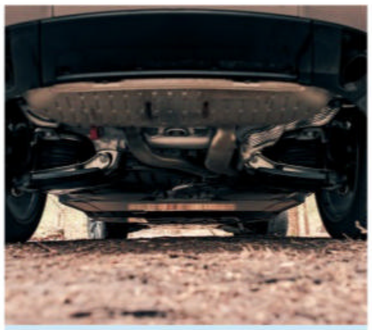
★★★★⯪

**PROS** Sanctuary-like ambience; class-leading comfort; vast boot
**CONS** Infotainment still trails the best; some key controls now digital

Climbing up into a Range Rover is never less than an event in itself, and once inside you'll find some of the most enveloping, sumptuous chairs fitted to any car currently on sale, along with the sort of material lavishness that wouldn't feel out of place in a Rolls-Royce. The driving position is perched but in a way that feels entirely in keeping with the Range Rover's character, and there's generous adjustability in the seats and steering column. A Range Rover remains one of the most comfortable cars money can buy.

The updated L460's cabin isn't quite as easy to navigate as before, though. Previously, a bank of capacitative buttons and roundels lined the base of the centre console, allowing the driver to make quick adjustments. That functionality is now the preserve of the sharp (but not always perfectly responsive) Pivi Pro touchscreen, on which commands take longer to enact. The same is true for the all-terrain mode selector, which used to be positioned on the transmission tunnel (in fairness, at the time we said this should be replaced by a rotary controller for the touchscreen), but now you need to go through various digital menus. The result of all this is a cabin that plays even more strongly – and successfully – into the minimalist, Scandi-flavoured atmosphere modern Range Rover favours, but at the expense of some usability.

Otherwise, this is a fine showing, particularly in regard to oddment storage and space in the back. ▸

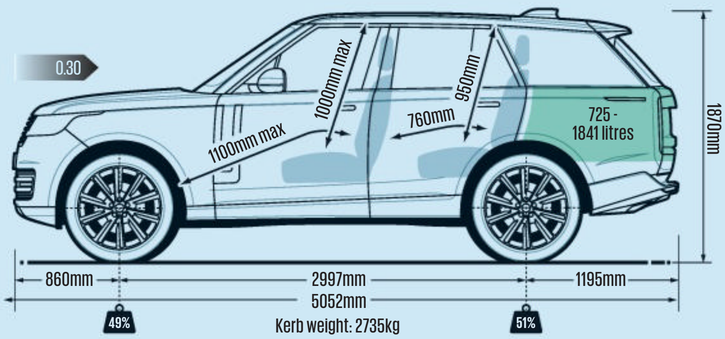


■ Air springs sit among suspension links of a simply monumental scale. The car also gets 48V active anti-roll bars as standard, as well as pronounced rear-axle steering.

■ Smart alloys don't look exceptionally big owing to the tyre's decent sidewall height, but they're actually 22in in diameter, highlighting the scale of the Range Rover.

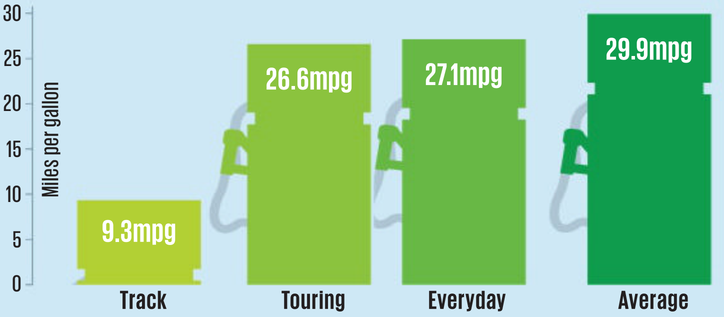
# TEST RESULTS

## DIMENSIONS



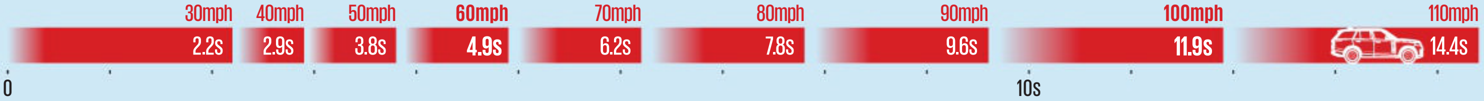
## RUNNING EFFICIENCY

**WLTP** 348.0mpg (combined) **Test range** 470/418/426 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** 44 miles

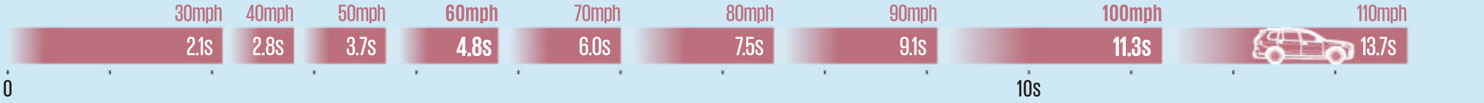


## ACCELERATION

**Test conditions** 3deg C, damp/frosty
**Standing quarter mile** 13.5sec at 106.3mph **Standing km** na **30-70mph** 4.0sec **30-70mph in fourth** 5.4sec **0-62mph** 5.1sec

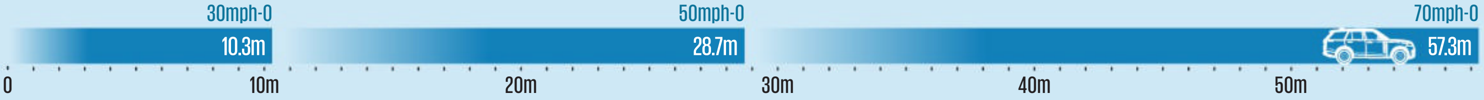


**BMW X7 xDrive M50i M Performance** (2020, 35deg C, dry)
**Standing quarter mile** 12.8sec at 111.4mph **Standing km** 23.2sec at 141.1mph **30-70mph** 3.8sec **30-70mph in fourth** 6.4sec

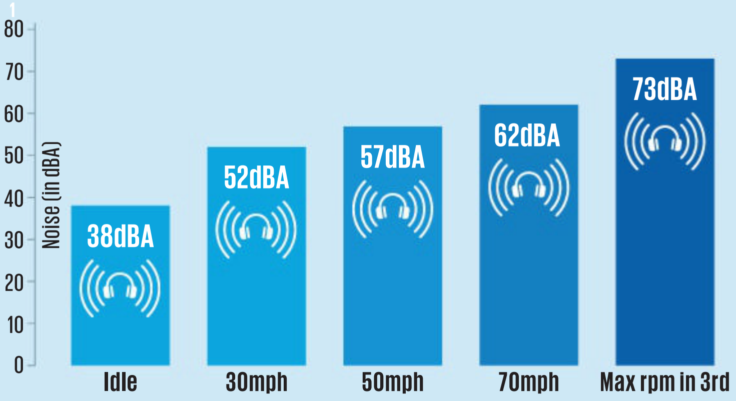


## BRAKING

**Dry 60-0mph** 3.09sec



## CABIN NOISE



## MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

### RANGE ROVER P550E AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**On-the-road price** £138,500
**Price as tested** £148,850
**Value after 3yrs/36k miles** £72,550
**Insurance group** 50

### HYBRID POWERTRAIN

**Engine** Front, longitudinal, 4WD
**Type** 6 cyls in line, 2997cc, twin-turbo, petrol; 395bhp, 406lb ft
**Motor** Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted; 215bhp, 332lb ft
**Battery** 38.2/31.8kWh (total/usable)
**Total power** 542bhp
**Total torque** 590lb ft
**Power to weight** 198bhp per tonne
**Torque to weight** 216lb ft per tonne

### GEARBOX

**Type** 8-spd automatic **rpm in top gear at 70/80mph** 1750/2000

### CHASSIS & BODY

**Construction** Steel and aluminium monocoque
**Weight/as tested** 2735kg/2979kg
**Wheels** 9.5Jx22in
**Tyres** 285/45 R22, Michelin Primacy All-Season

### SUSPENSION & STEERING

**Front** Double wishbones, air springs, active anti-roll bar
**Rear** Multi-link, air springs, active anti-roll bar **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.7 turns lock to lock; 11.4m turning circle

For information on the Range Rover, contact Land Rover Customer Services, Abbey Road, Whitley, Coventry, CV3 4LF (0370 500 0500, landrover.co.uk)

> "You steer with the fingertips – and hardly a care in the world"

RANGE ROVER
KR74 EXO

PETER LIDDIARD

## PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

**PROS** Performance is muscular, not overbearing; slick hybrid integration
**CONS** EV mode is a touch anaemic

There's a school of thought that says a car of this magnitude and role in life needs either a petrol V8 or a sizeable turbo diesel, for the bottomless torque either option brings. In reality, petrol straight-six PHEV grunt suits the Range Rover rather well, particularly if you have an unapologetically lavish example on your hands – as our wood-trimmed, light-leathered Autobiography car happens to be.

For one thing, the level of performance on offer is more than adequate. A recorded 0-60mph time of less than five seconds is strong given the car's near-three-tonne mass, and 11.9sec to 100mph means the medium-rare P550e only slightly trails the red-hot, carbonfibre-bonneted and deafeningly loud Range Rover Sport SVR of 2015.

The nature of the performance is more compelling still. The car starts up in EV mode whenever possible and moves off the mark with a grace you don't initially expect, and the powertrain will continue to operate in zero-emission fashion for as long as there is charge in the battery and nothing more than modest acceleration is asked for. While not quick in its pure-electric mode, as an EV the P550e gives a measured, polite account of itself that bodes well for the upcoming electric Range Rover proper.

When it does come on song with a distant nasal thrum, the 3.0-litre petrol six is rather a lovely companion. Its initial response is enhanced by the 215bhp electric motor, especially at low crank speeds, but the calibration of the two power sources is slick, with electric force then tapering as the engine hits its sweet spot. This is an intuitive powertrain, with a precision that makes the driving experience just a touch simpler.

## RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

**PROS** Remarkably comfortable seats; classy gait and steering
**CONS** Secondary ride can be harsh at times; rivals have greater control

JLR hasn't tinkered with the Range Rover's suspension or steering systems for this update, and neither did it need to. The car's dynamics are characterised by gentle but controlled roll along with steering of a modest speed and which is seemingly immune to any kind of deflection. It is deftly weighted too, such that you end up guiding the car in a manner similar to that of a Rolls-Royce: with the fingertips – and hardly a care in the world. Equally, the Range Rover still trails the BMW X7 when it comes to fast-road composure, although this is as you would expect given the British car's more wholesale off-road ability compared with the German car's sporting undertones. Similarly, a Bentley Bentayga has a more determined dynamic character than the Range Rover, but it often isn't quite as effortless, with its tighter vertical control and heftier steering.

Both comfort and the sense of wellbeing these cars are known to instil remain stellar. Climbing up into a Range Rover and closing the vast door behind you remains cathartic, and once on the move there is little that can pierce the cabin's bubble of calm. A reading of 62dBA at 70mph is a match for the Mercedes-Benz EQS 450+ Business Class recently tested – an aero-optimised luxo-EV of the highest order. The Range Rover's long-wave gait is wonderfully unflustered: it flirts with feeling outright lethargic at times but never spills over into feeling loose or vague. It's unique in this class. Equally, though, the slightly reactive secondary ride, especially at low speeds, is starting to feel off the pace. We know from experience that smaller wheels help the L460 to a degree, but they cannot remedy the issue entirely.

## BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯪☆

**PROS** Luxury and off-road ability in one package; reasonable EV range
**CONS** More expensive than ever; hardly economical in ICE mode

As well as being the Range Rover's bridge to electrification, the L460 has seen the model become even more of an unapologetic luxury product. Prices now start above £104,000, with the long-wheelbase variant (available only in Autobiography and SV guises) commanding at least £129k. A LWB P615 in SV trim is more than £192,000, which is in Bentayga territory – not that the Range Rover doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as its compatriot, because in many regards it does.

The electric range is highly dependent on your route and driving style. In general you can expect 35 to 50 miles on a full charge (7kW maximum speed). After that, the P550e returns around 27mpg in everyday driving – reasonable, but it could easily be improved with the loss of, say, half a tonne in kerb weight. For touring, you might claw 450 miles out of the 71-litre tank with a light foot, but 420 miles is more realistic.

RANGE ROVER
KR74 EXC

# VERDICT

## A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form

★★★★☆

If diesel grunt is the traditional choice for an SUV of this scope and pure-electric power is the direction in which Range Rover is headed, in the here and now a petrol-electric blend would seem to do nicely. This car is an unashamedly luxury product, and JLR's smooth petrol straight six is an excellent mill in that respect. Electric assistance also gives a welcome boost of precision and muscle, not to mention a convincing taste of what the upcoming all-electric Range Rover will offer. We'd love a little more switchgear and a slicker secondary ride, but in all other respects this car remains compelling.

## RIVALS

1 **RANGE ROVER**

**BMW X7 M60i xDRIVE** From £116,910
★★★★☆

**MERCEDES GLS 450 4MATIC BUSINESS**
From £122,540
★★★⯪☆

**AUDI SQ7 VORSPRUNG**
From £114,080
★★★⯪☆

# GOODWOOF

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**MATT SAUNDERS**

# Testing, testing

10:39
P
9 °C
Last 50 km
4.6 mi/kWh
60.0 mpg
53.3 mpg
mph
% power
HEV
1875mile

Jaecoo 7 will need the mother of all software updates to make the grade

Autocar is fast filling up with mentions of 'software-defined vehicles' – cars whose performance and functionality is primarily defined electronically rather than physically. The computing power of the car becomes its ruling characteristic and the software for it can be improved and updated time and again, so that it's never finished, rather in a constant state of flux.

The car industry is predictably excited about this idea. I suspect that any customers who have ever had an over-the-air software update go a bit wrong won't be quite so keen. As for me, I'm a bit puzzled how manufacturers can seriously be contemplating giving software an even greater role in the cars they will make in years to come while at least some of them are doing such an awful job with the stuff they're making in 2025.

I'm not sure that the new Jaecoo 7, which you can read about in detail from p30, counts as an SDV, but it has certainly inspired something of a software-defined verdict. Honestly, this car is like some cautionary parable of terrible, dystopian motoring yet to come.

> **"It's like a cautionary parable of dystopian motoring to come"**

The 7 is the latest mid-sized SUV to arrive on the UK market from China. It's made by the country's fourth-largest manufacturer, Chery. It looks a bit like a Range Rover Velar that has been made on the bones of something slightly shorter. In a very broad-brush, box-ticky kind of way, it drives well enough. You can get petrol and plug-in hybrid versions, and the latter proved to be quite refined and efficient, with predictable and obedient handling and ride comfort that, while a bit restless and wooden, is far from offensive.

None of that matters much, though, because the car's software is so bad, affects so much and ultimately, by making you question the integrity of the wider design and engineering of the car simply by association, undermines the whole product. It's a farce.

Jaecoo's digital deficiencies come at you gradually and so corrosively.

The first that bubbled up for me was the trip computer. The 7 doesn't actually have a conventional trip computer but instead records rolling 50km indications of efficiency, specific to both its hybrid and electric operating modes.

The trouble is that the indications are wildly, comically inaccurate. The hybrid-mode 'trip' seems to get stuck at 60mpg or is incapable of displaying anything higher, while the electric-mode one regularly skyrockets beyond 1000mpkWh. You can't believe or trust either of them. They're like the Jay and Silent Bob of the automotive instrumentation niche.

Next, I noticed that the battery meter didn't seem to be, well, metered right. The 'gauge' (it's a digital pretend one, obviously) never seems to slip below about 20%. At that point, the battery is deemed empty and the car switches into hybrid mode.

So why tell me there's still about eight miles of electric range left if you're only prepared to let me access it once I've unearthed the surprise EV+ driving mode, which comes with a warning message that it should only be enabled "in emergency situations"? Why not just pretend it isn't there at all until I actually need it? And then poof: "You seem to have run out of fuel, sir. Could I interest you in eight electric bonus miles?"

Then there's the risible calibration of the driver assistance systems, which are intrusive enough to move you to violence. There are the ventilation controls and primary touchscreen navigation bar, which disappear when you connect your phone to Apple CarPlay. And there's the wider touchscreen itself, which looks like a budget-brand tablet computer that has been unceremoniously plonked on the dashboard and isn't any less distracting to use than that would suggest.

Finally, there's the odometer. The simplest line of code in the car, you would think. How could anyone get that wrong? For some unfathomable reason, the 7's only counts miles covered in hybrid mode. Seriously. Well, electric-powered ones don't really wear out the tyres and brakes, do they? And you're not obliged to admit to them at resale time, either, are you…?

’90s Special

BMW 528i
LAMBORGHINI DIABLO SV
TOYOTA RAV4
MGF
LOTUS ELISE

# Now that’s what I call a group test

FORD MONDEO
VAUXHALL LOTUS CARLTON
MERCEDES-BENZ A-CLASS
AUDI TT
NISSAN SKYLINE GT-R

Nostalgia has never been so appealing, so we've made a compilation album of the decade's greatest motoring hits. **STEVE CROPLEY** is your DJ

**PHOTOGRAPHY** MAX EDLESTON

Everyone loves 1990s cars. Over the past decade their popularity has risen rapidly as the differences between them and contemporary models have become ever more distinct.

What's the reason? After all, 1990s cars are now 25 to 35 years out of date. And there isn't the same love out there for the cars of the 1980s or 2000s. It's tempting to blame simple nostalgia: teenage kids of the mid-1990s are approaching 50 today. Back then they desired the cars of their era; today they can do something about it.

We believe there's much more to it than that, though. Today, the cars of the 1990s are admired by a far wider cohort of enthusiasts than those teenagers of the time. There's a unique purity and originality baked into the best of them that speaks especially of the 1990s.

What was so special about the era? Sociologists say our lives were simpler. The world economy boomed, the internet was in its infancy and there were no smartphones. Computers were boxy beige appliances people used only at work. One pithy 10-word summary of the 1990s speaks of 'better music, better movies, better people, better cars, better economy'.

For car companies life was simpler, too. Climate change wasn't yet an issue. Government regulation of car design was a factor, but shapes and structures were limited far less than today. Dieselgate was two decades away. No one saw a need for today's vast investment in EVs and battery tech, but car companies' economics were already greatly assisted by platform theory: distinct models built off similar underpinnings. Car companies were far more free to concentrate on creating cars people could love – and they did.

This realisation, this rising interest in the 1990s, is what encouraged us recently to gather 10 of the best and most disparate 1990s cars we could find at a favourite location in Gloucestershire. The mission was to drive and understand the rationale behind them all over again, to enjoy them and to discover, above all, whether all the love was misplaced. Here's how it went, alphabetically speaking.

The Audi TT, launched late in 1998, is one of the most successful 'platform' models yet created. Not many who viewed it as a cheaper Porsche Boxster alternative would have known, without being told, that this individualistic and timeless 2+2 coupé, revealed as a concept in 1995, was really a Volkswagen Golf. When we finally got our hands on a 225bhp 1.8-litre turbo version in December 1998, we were enthusiastic about its strong performance, entertaining handling and terrific cabin.

The TT lived a long life: the last of three generations was built in November 2023. But the original TT styling that emanated in VW's California studios makes a particular case for '90s cars. It is by far the most distinctive of the three TTs and destined always to be the collectors' favourite. ▶

**MGF's folding roof is less of a fiddle than it might look**

> **“Cars' shapes and structures were limited far less than today”**

**MGF 1.8i**
**Price new** £15,995 (1995)
**Price now** £1999 (1998/R, 35,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1796cc, petrol
**Power** 118bhp at 5500rpm
**Torque** 122lb ft at 3000rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, RWD
**Kerb weight** 1073kg
**0-60mph** 8.7sec
**Top speed** 123mph

## *Rediscovering the...*
# BMW 528i

After sampling the E39 5 Series for the first time back in 1995, we declared it "probably the best car in the world". Bold stuff. Our opinion hadn't changed a few months later: the same 528i was subjected to our rigorous road test, earning a full five-star rating and a sign-off that exclaimed: "To all intents and purposes, the near-perfect car."

It's fair to say, then, that expectations where high even 30 years later as I contemplated Adrian Aldea's very tidy 1999 528i. What strikes you first are the car's elegant and beautifully proportioned lines – it's easy to see how the angular and aggressive Chris Bangle-penned E60 that replaced the E39 came as such an eye-assaulting shock. If anything, the interior is even more of a treat. The quality of finish and the design logic are absolute, with high-grade materials used throughout and a dashboard layout that remains unrivalled for both style and usability. Anyone who tells you TFT screens are an upgrade over traditional analogue dials, meanwhile, has clearly never spent time with this BMW's brilliantly legible clock set.

But what about the driving experience? Surely that has aged, hasn't it? Well, the naturally aspirated 2.8-litre straight six feels a bit limp low down compared with today's turbocharged engines, but its silky-smooth delivery, high-end sparkle and cultured soundtrack are a fine trade-off. And while the five-speed automatic gearbox lacks the responsive snap of modern units, it shuffles ratios so slickly that you don't mind. Refinement is strong, too, with barely a whisper of wind noise and only the slightest mechanical murmur at speed. Adrian's aftermarket coilover suspension makes it tricky to get an accurate read on a chassis once hailed for its sublime ride and handling balance, but you get a clear sense of the BMW's agility and accuracy: the 528i feels as wieldy and compact as a current 3 Series.

Ultimately, the engineering integrity shines through: there's a sense that this car was developed by people unconcerned by how much it might cost. Want an example? The latent heat reservoir hidden behind the dashboard could store engine heat for up to two days, ensuring that even on a cold start, warm air was pumping through the cabin in just 30 seconds. It's brilliant – but it wasn't cheap.

So, is this fourth-generation 5 Series the best car ever? Probably not. But it remains a high-water mark of automotive history and a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when economic and engineering constraints are lifted. **JD**

### BMW 528i

**Price new** £29,990 (1996)
**Price now** £2000 (1999/T, 170,000 miles)
**Engine** 6 cyls in line, 2793cc, petrol
**Power** 193bhp at 5300rpm
**Torque** 206lb ft at 3950rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd automatic, RWD
**Kerb weight** 1530kg
**0-60mph** 8.8sec
**Top speed** 145mph

### THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

The 1990s were peak homologation-special territory, as car makers fought for World Rally Championship domination with turbocharged, total-traction Group A tearaways. So as a dedicated rally fan, I'd have eaten my bobble hat for the chance to tag along on a 1994 group test of the Lancia Delta HF Integrale, Ford Escort RS Cosworth and Subaru Impreza Turbo 2000. **JD**

E39 5 Series is refined, finely honed and still great to drive today

### *Rediscovering the...*
# Audi TT

'Surprise and delight' seems to be a marketing strategy these days, but there was a time when there was something more tangible to it. The inside of an Audi TT is full of surprises and delights, both when it was new and now. This is such a special-feeling car, even decades on from the launch, with the kind of perceived material quality and design touches that wouldn't get near an affordable production model these days.

It has diddy, switch-like door handles; the heated seat switches push out from the dash before rotating and gradually lighting (they must be fearsomely expensive); the audio gets a 'TT'-stamped satin cover; and the air vents are a delight. Buyers must have been blown away by how bespoke this little Bauhausian marvel felt at the time. I'd love one for all of these things now.

Early drivers may not have been totally blown away by the driving experience. The TT wasn't a bad drive by any means, but there were a lot of seriously entertaining coupés on sale at the time and the TT was very closely related to some fairly ordinary hatchbacks. But with 225bhp (there was a 180bhp variant, too) it was fast and comfortable, and by today's standards it's light and agile.

If there was a problem with the TT, it was that its exterior design – that achingly pretty rear end (even better looking than the concept, to my eyes) – created a little bit of aerodynamic lift. Enough of it, anyway, for some drivers who thought that four-wheel drive was always stable to discover the hard way that it wasn't. Audi said it would take cars back to revise springs, bushes and anti-roll bars and fit ESP – an offer 95% of UK owners took up. Visually, the work also included a rear lip spoiler. I thought it looked much better without, so it's a delight to find this example doesn't have it.

The TT is an absolutely cracking modern classic that you could drive daily. And if I hadn't already just bought a cheap Audi I don't need, I'd be tempted to do so. **MP**

**AUDI TT 1.8T QUATTRO 225**

**Price new** £29,650 (1999)
**Price now** £3000 (2002/02, 90,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1781cc, turbocharged, petrol
**Power** 225bhp at 5900rpm
**Torque** 206lb ft at 2200-5500rpm
**Gearbox** 6-spd manual, 4WD
**Kerb weight** 1395kg
**0-60mph** 6.1sec
**Top speed** 151mph

'Iconic' is a grossly misused word, but it's a fitting way of describing the TT's shape

Raw Diablo SV is quite different from Golf-based TT, but both are very much of their era

**"The TT is a design icon you can use like a normal car"**

Matt Prior instantly liked the TT, calling it "a proper concept car made real". Illya Verpraet was also surprised. "It's not a sports car," he wrote, "but it's very pleasant and rounded to drive. The driving position is good, the gearchange is positive, the engine is strong and smooth and there's plenty of usable grip. It's a design icon you can use like a normal car." Not bad going for a 27-year-old (the car, not Verpraet…).

BMW's E39 528i is a fine example of the purity of the Munich company's styling, before the complications set in. The meaty straight six engine, the driver-focused driving position and the unmatched clarity of the two dominant instruments say 'ultimate driving machine' as effectively as the words themselves.

There's a lowness and a purity of line that speak unmistakably of a time when the revered Wolfgang Reitzle was still running the show and producing a generation of BMWs that is still much admired. This was the pre-Bangle era, when the design chief and management felt compelled to find a new styling direction. Launched in 1995, the E39 looks small today, roughly the size of today's 3 Series, but there's an authority to its shape that still identifies it as the mid-range executive model.

"Even now," writes James Disdale, "the 5 Series stands up to the scrutiny of modern eyes, ears and hands. The interior is spacious, the dashboard is an ergonomic masterclass and the driving position is without fault."

Then there's that creamy-smooth 2.8-litre straight six that generates more than enough energy to easily keep pace with today's traffic. It's only the slightly ponderous shift time of the otherwise slick five-speed auto that ages the car. The steering is naturally geared and weighted, the natural rear-drive balance can be exploited at sensible speeds and it's refined enough to shame many moderns.

By contrast, the Ford Mondeo 1.8 LX mostly set out to impress fleet managers. This was the Blue Oval at the height of its powers, and during a period when two-thirds of Britain's new cars were bought by businesses. But with the help of legendary chief engineer Richard Parry-Jones, Ford had moved on a long way from the crummy Cortina days. When the Mondeo hit the market in 1993 it was praised by Autocar in a mighty 14-page launch test entitled 'Mondeo is king' and which was alleged to have boosted Ford's New York share price. We followed that up a couple of months later by driving a 1.8 LX 12,000 miles around Europe in a week.

Verpraet reckons the Mondeo aces Parry-Jones's famous 20-metre test, because the driving position is great and the controls are easy and intuitive – both things you notice before you're out of first gear. "It can't help feeling old because of the shape, colour, materials, low waistline and vast glass area," he added, "but you can row it along in ordinary traffic and feel very satisfied."

Prior is a bit worried for the Mondeo, though. "It's showing little sign of moving from the old banger phase and into its classic time," he said. "I'm not even sure the Sierra, its predecessor, has managed to do that yet." ▸

Vauxhall Lotus Carlton is still riotously quick, and it goes sideways at will

### VAUXHALL LOTUS CARLTON

**Price new** £48,000 (1990)
**Price now** £84,995 (1992/K, 73,000 miles)
**Engine** 6 cyls in line, 3615cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
**Power** 377bhp at 5200rpm
**Torque** 419lb ft at 4200rpm
**Gearbox** 6-spd manual, RWD
**Kerb weight** 1655kg
**0-60mph** 5.1sec
**Top speed** 176mph

Scratch this picture and sniff: you can smell the nostalgia

Hard to find a greater contrast to a Mondeo than a Lamborghini Diablo SV, launched in the mid-1990s as a higher-powered (but ironically slightly cheaper) version of the standard 1990 Diablo, born as the Countach replacement.

Yet, like the Mondeo, it typifies the 1990s in several ways: it was completed under Chrysler ownership of the company, which came about at a time when big corporates were becoming interested in bespoke sports car manufacturers (Toyota, then General Motors, at Lotus; Ford at Aston Martin). Its design, originally penned by Marcello Gandini in his sharp-edged style, was 'softened' by Chrysler's people, a move which today indisputably ages the car.

The car you see here was our original road test machine, and it definitely speaks of another era. The scissor-opening doors make ingress and egress very hard, the driving position isn't brilliant and reversing the Lambo is a guessing game because rear vision is so poor.

Yet when you drive it today there's a magnificent exuberance about the engine's thrust and sound – and the all-mechanical gated gearchange – which takes you right away from the curbs and limitations of today. Once you learn its quirks, the car drives very well. Steering is heavy, but grip is still impressive. And because the weight is lower than many today – at 1570kg – the SV doesn't even feel excessively large or heavy, although it did at the time.

'Dated' really isn't a description you should apply to the Lotus Elise, a car many agree always looked best in its original form. In fact, it looks modern and well-proportioned enough to be made today. The Elise also embodies some of the most important values of 2025 affordable car design: chassis rigidity, light weight and a corrosion-free bonded structure, in this case made from extruded aluminium.

The Elise appeared soon after Lotus's unsuccessful dalliance with a front-wheel-drive Elan, and it took the company right back to the Chapman era of compact, rear-drive simplicity. The Elise was conceived in the early 1990s and launched in 1995, and at the time we reckoned it "really is the new Seven". About that we were half right: it was more civilised and somewhat heavier than a Seven, but like the Caterhams it utilised brilliantly components that were common and cheaply available.

For yours truly, the original Elise is a reminder of why I've owned two of them – and why I sold them. They were quick for the power, agile and terrific fun to drive, and quite reliable for a marque not known for it. But entry is problematic and the hoods are terrible. Still, once you're installed, they always feel special: they remind you why power steering, for the purest cars, simply isn't needed.

If cars such as the original Audi TT and Lotus Elise are lasting icons, the Mercedes-Benz A-Class will always be a curiosity: a novel car whose launch was interrupted by its highly publicised failure of the elk test, an extreme examination in swervability invented by Car of the Year jurors in Scandinavia. Hatched during an era when premium manufacturers were finding new ▸

> *"There's a magnificent exuberance about the Diablo engine's thrust and sound"*

## THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

**Ferrari 550 Maranello**

This feels like a tap-in, but hey ho. The 550 reinvigorated the front-engined V12 Ferrari for the modern era. If you're ever lucky enough to drive one somewhere you can really hang it out, you'll be enjoying one of the sweetest-handling road cars ever made. **RL**

A-Class got off to a rocky start, but it was truly innovative

### MERCEDES-BENZ A140 ELEGANCE

**Price new** £14,490 (1998)
**Price now** £2250 (1999/V, 58,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1397cc, petrol
**Power** 82bhp at 5000rpm
**Torque** 96lb ft at 3750rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, FWD
**Kerb weight** 1061kg
**0-60mph** 11.9sec
**Top speed** 105mph

A140's high-rise driving position predates the crossover revolution

## *Rediscovering the…*
# Lamborghini Diablo SV

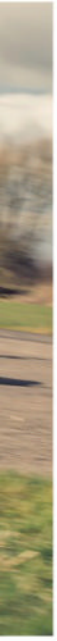
As Steve so eloquently describes in the main story, there are plenteous reasons to gaze back at the 1990s in a state of deep wistfulness. The colours, the sounds, the mechanical engagement and, if it isn't too dry, the pricing structures. These days car makers have cottoned on to the cachet that comes with owning the fastest, lightest, loudest performance car in the range, and they charge accordingly. But 30 years ago there was greater semblance of a relationship between how much a car cost to build and how it was subsequently priced. It's why the pared-back Diablo SV, easily the best of its kind when it came to synaptic delight, was one-fifth cheaper than the regular car when it went on sale in 1996. A bargain? Just a bit, yeah…

This blinding example belongs to James Beaumont, who has a side hustle restoring Vauxhall Lotus Carltons and whose SV is in supreme mechanical fettle. 'N666 LAM' also happens to be the machine we road tested in July 1996. Cards on the table: I'm still expecting something uncomfortable, recalcitrant and a bit beastly from this Lambo; something lacking the cohesiveness between steering, balance and traction you would ideally want in an ageing, 510bhp Italian supercar whose hulking 5.7-litre V12, coming on-cam at 4000rpm, frightens wildlife into the undergrowth from a distance of half a kilometre. But in reality? This SV is something of a revelation. Yes, the dog-leg gearbox takes learning and the cockpit is, er, fragile, but the clutch is forgiving without being mushy, the steering is medium-weighted and has real life in it and the intimidation factor lasts only so long. The Diablo SV has a robust character, undeniably, but it is no lead-footed brute and is disarmingly straightforward to slide about on a damp airfield.

And the engine. Goodness. There's more grit in the sound and tactile feedback of this V12, which is an evolution of the Bizzarrini design of the 1960s, than in any of the post-Murcielago motors, and those are hardly shy. It's a ripper, a screamer and a bit peaky: the whole show at times feels very much like that of an almighty engine with a car attached to it almost as an afterthought. Except the SV package is no afterthought. It's a lovable classic supercar that, with the right care and attention, is clearly lots of fun to use and not half as challenging as I had expected. **RL**

### LAMBORGHINI DIABLO SV

**Price new** £124,995 (1996)
**Price now** £450,000 (1996/N, 25,000 miles)
**Engine** V12, 5707cc, petrol
**Power** 510bhp at 7100rpm
**Torque** 428lb ft at 5200rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, RWD
**Kerb weight** 1567kg (as tested)
**0-60mph** 4.2sec (as tested)
**Top speed** 200mph-plus

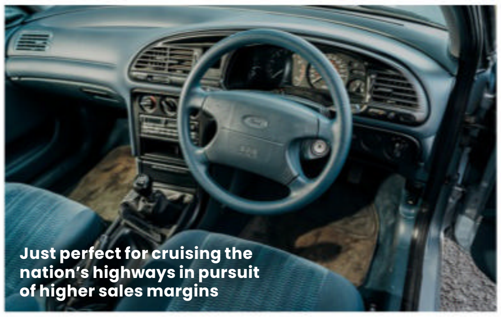


GM softened the Diablo's edges, but it's still not one for shrinking violets

SV's peaky, normally aspirated V12 is a raw expression of power

Don't be afraid: Diablo SV makes this sort of thing surprisingly accessible

Decade-defining Mondeo even donated its name to a voting demographic



Just perfect for cruising the nation's highways in pursuit of higher sales margins

## *Rediscovering the...*
## Ford Mondeo

There wasn't a more significant car among those we gathered for this 1990s retrospective than the Ford Mondeo. How could we have left it out? And, as humble as it undoubtedly was (a 1995 1.8 LX hatchback borrowed from Ford's heritage collection), absolutely nobody left the airfield feeling like it was in any way unworthy of its place.

If you're a longtime Autocar reader, you'll know the story of how this car kick-started a transformation of the corporate fortunes of its creator when it was launched in 1993. It was itself so widely owned and culturally ingrained that it was famously used to help define the swing voters moved to elect the Blair Labour government on Thursday 1 May 1997. The Mondeo Mk1 might be the greatest automotive symbol of mid- to-late 1990s booming Britain.

Can you remember its blue dashboard? It seems something of an irony in light of the way 'Mondeo Man' actually voted in 1997 - but there it was on our test car: Tory blue all over the fascia, door cards, steering wheel and seats (higher-trim grades got a less jazzy black interior, with 'wooden' trim on upmarket Ghias in the grandest '90s traditions – but that hardly sounds very progressive, either). The blue velour on the seats and door panels brings about a strange Pavlovian olfactory response: you can almost smell the years of soaked-in tobacco smoke of a typical car, even though ours, albeit in immaculate museum spec, actually smelled like a rose.

Does the driving experience hold up? Honestly, I'd say it gets very close. Even on 14in wheels with 185-section tyres, and those memorable cheese-grater hubcaps (which '90s car anorak Disdale noted should actually have been affixed to a GLX and not an LX, the spod), the Mondeo has superbly tactile and inviting steering; really willing and fluent handling; surprisingly taut and sophisticated body control; and enough lightness and energy in its performance level, even as a 113bhp 1.8, to keep up with 2025 traffic without problem. When you give it some gusto, the Mondeo's chassis responds in turn by keeping its balance and composure rather than rolling and lurching around. It's not a sports saloon, but it's certainly game and ready to please.

Pre-facelift Mk1s are rare finds these days, for understandable reasons (Mondeos weren't fully galvanised until the third-generation models of the 2000s), so few would be as sweet to drive as our museum piece without more than a little TLC. But finding one, and showing it some 'things can only get better' love, would definitely feel like a worthy, rewarding and even quite culturally important thing to do. **MS**

**FORD MONDEO 1.8 LX**
**Price new** £13,895 (1993)
**Price now** £5000 (1995/M, 90,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1796cc, petrol
**Power** 113bhp at 5750rpm
**Torque** 116lb ft at 3750rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, FWD
**Kerb weight** 1310kg
**0-60mph** 10.4sec
**Top speed** 122mph

Elise meets Carlton: Hethel's output in the 1990s was nirvana for the enthusiast

**LOTUS ELISE S1**
**Price new** £18,950 (1996)
**Price now** £19,950 (1999/V, 56,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1796cc, petrol
**Power** 118bhp at 5500rpm
**Torque** 122lb ft at 3000rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, RWD
**Kerb weight** 723kg
**0-60mph** 5.5sec
**Top speed** 124mph

Mondeo feels its age but is still a satisfying thing to throw around

Elise is simple but oh so effective. Getting in and out is a chore, though

Rover K-series has rarely been put to better use than here

*"The Vauxhall Lotus Carlton is lovely to stroke along 98% of the time"*

◀ ways to steal sales from mainstreamers like Ford and Renault, the A-Class is shorter than a Ford Fiesta and very boxy. Disdale was pretty enthusiastic about our A140 Elegance.

"Take a spin in the A140 and you'll wonder why it didn't spark a revolution," he said. "It sold in decent numbers, but few other manufacturers were willing to follow Mercedes' bold, engineering-led approach. No doubt the A-Class cost a fortune to develop, but the result is a car that packs a remarkable amount of space into a compact footprint, and its clever sandwich-section floor was designed to swallow the engine in a frontal impact.

"There's SUV-like elevation to the driving position that combines brilliantly with excellent visibility, while on the move the A-Class feels far more agile and secure than that infamous elk test would have you believe."

While Lotus was at work on the Elise, Rover Group, which had spent the 1980s using its MG badges to distinguish assorted, not-very-good Rover saloons, decided to use its new K-series engine, plus various Metro suspension parts, in a new mid-engined roadster called the MGF, an answer to the many calls for another two-seater after MGB production ended in 1980. The F hit the market just as BMW acquired Rover, but when BMW departed five years later it became part of a management buyout (by the infamous Phoenix Four) that formed MG Rover.

It was a decent little car whose styling was the work of Gerry McGovern, JLR's design chief today, and it sold well for a while even against the Mazda MX-5. But indifferent build quality and corporate uncertainties weighed against it. Still, even today it's a well-founded, practical and good-looking little car, available at bargain prices. Matt Saunders rated the F as "not quite as entertaining to its core as a Mazda MX-5", but praised it for its responsiveness, agility and pliant, Hydragas ride. "It's a carefree sports car you wouldn't feel obliged to drive the wheels off and could enjoy at any speed," he added.

For a bewildering array of generations, models and specifications, look no further than Nissan's array of Skylines, a breed that began in the 1960s at Prince Motors before that defunct marque was acquired by Nissan. Happily for UK buyers in the 1990s, the key car was the Nissan Skyline R34 GT-R, a byword for expensive, high-tech Japanese performance, what with its four-wheel drive, four-wheel steering and meaty 276bhp 2.6-litre straight six, fed via two turbochargers.

Skylines were rare and very often augmented with wheel and bodywork mods and huge power increases; they were such a means to a performance end that standard cars like the example we have here are now extremely rare.

"Years ago it was impossible to drive a Skyline GT-R without it bearing an enormous weight of cultish hype," said Saunders. "Today, though, you can just let this car's driving experience wash over you. Or rather swallow you whole, after you've let the boost build fully. I was surprised how compact, lightweight, tactile and old-school analogue this car felt. Still quick, too, even by modern standards, and it still has that ▶

Remove the spoiler and the Vauxhall Lotus Carlton would go almost unnoticed

◂ competition-firm body control and natural rear-wheel-drive cornering poise. I loved it."

Given all the 1990s action above, it's probably no surprise that this fruitful era can also claim to have hatched the now universally desired compact SUV – via the launch of the Toyota RAV4. Born as a concept in 1989, it popped up in three-door form in the UK in June 1994 and as a five-door a year later. As many SUV pretenders now do, Toyota drew bits from existing models: a Corolla platform, a Camry engine, Celica GT4 suspension and about the cutest original shape going. Of course, it was wildly successful. Mind you, a glance at our original three-door and the latest like-the-others RAV4 of 2025 suggests – once again – that the 1990s was indeed an era of inventiveness and purity in car creation.

Saunders said: "Full disclosure: if Land Rover's Discovery Mk1 had been available, this Toyota might not have made the cut – but I'm glad it did. I'm convinced there would have been no Freelander, Qashqai, CR-V and the rest without a RAV4 to prove the public appetite for small, cheap, higher-riding cars. It feels like some better-mannered Series 1 Land Rover on the road: compact, upright and quietly agile, with great visibility, cheery looks and lots of charm."

Big performance, not cuteness, was the major criterion for the remarkable 1990 Vauxhall Lotus Carlton, an outcome of General Motors' seven-year control of Lotus between 1986 and 1993. The Hethel company had been successful with the Lotus Cortina and Talbot Sunbeam Lotus, so why not a hot-shoe version of the straight-six-powered Vauxhall Carlton?

With chassis mods plus a 377bhp twin-turbo engine, the Vauxhall Lotus Carlton could run a 5.1sec 0-60mph time and reach 176mph – which made it officially the world's fastest four-door. Autocar asked Richard Noble, then the world land speed record holder, to run a top speed, but he couldn't beat the official mark.

"I came of age reading about the Carlton's top speed," writes Richard Lane. "Having driven one now, I see there's much more to the experience. There's a sumptuous cockpit with the kind of visibility alien to modern counterparts. And because the ride is pliant, it's a lovely thing just to stroke along 98% of the time. For the other 2% it's a riot. It has a power-to-traction ratio you don't see in modern cars. Torquey six, manual 'box and limited adhesion? It's a super-saloon that can be steered on the throttle anywhere, any time."

There's no winner here. The whole decade of 1990s car design and engineering is what earns the accolade. This sample of cars launched in the 1990s contains a wonderful array: timeless icons that were better than their replacements (Elise, TT), important trend-setters (RAV4, MGF), volume cars done at a new, higher standard (528i, Mondeo) and performance cars that progressed the genre in new ways (Diablo, Skyline, Carlton). That leaves only the Mercedes A-Class, whose makers never saw fit to take it very far along the bold technical path on which it started out. Which is ironic: if our view of the future tells us anything, it is that small, space-efficient car designs are what the world will surely need. **A**

A rose-tinted spectacle: '90s cars had a more individualistic appeal

K948 XGS
T180 DWL
N897 VHN
N666 L

## THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

The 2000s may have been the heyday for hot hatches, but the '90s were the run-up to that. Not all of them were great, but manufacturers were putting silly engines in small cars (six-cylinder Golf, anyone?), while the French were building a reputation for spectacular front-wheel-drive stuff with the Renault Clio Williams and Peugeot 306 GTi-6. I would have liked a go in the latter to see if it lives up to the hype. **IV**

### TOYOTA RAV4 MK1 3DR

**Price new** £13,995 (GX, 1994)
**Price now** £1750 (1997/R, 162,000 miles)
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1998cc, petrol
**Power** 129bhp at 5600rpm
**Torque** 129lb ft at 4600rpm
**Gearbox** 5-spd manual, 4WD
**Kerb weight** 1163kg
**0-60mph** 8.8sec
**Top speed** 110mph

MGF is agile and fun to drive; cute RAV4 sowed the seed for compact SUVs

## *Rediscovering the...*
# Nissan Skyline GT-R

It was absolutely gushing it down when I went to pick up the Skyline GT-R from Nissan. Not great weather for classic motoring, but ideal for a four-wheel-drive all-weather sports car.

Audi kick-started the idea of a four-wheel-drive road car with the Quattro in the 1980s, but the Japanese manufacturers really ran with it in the '90s. The Subaru Legacys and Imprezas, Mitsubishi Lancer Evos and Toyota Celica GT4s were fighting it out on the rally stage, while Nissan applied the technology to the race track with the Skyline GT-R.

The Skyline name goes back a long way, but the four-wheel-drive GT-Rs are what we're interested here. It went through R32, R33 and R34 generations during the '90s, all a variation of the same concept: a pumped-up coupé body powered by a twin-turbo straight six (the RB26 for the code nerds). The GT-Rs not only drove all four wheels but also steered them, choreographing it all with a brace of sensors that were the height of sophistication but which led some to dismiss them as computers on wheels.

Enthusiasts of my generation will know the Skyline GT-R best from our equivalent of bedroom posters: racing video games. Gran Turismo in particular made the Skyline into a hero, but also into one you couldn't really avoid. To me, the Skyline was a bit too ubiquitous, even though only a handful came to the UK officially.

To the real thing, then, and initially it just feels like a nice, normal car, albeit with very firm suspension and loads of road roar. The straight six is super-smooth and doesn't shout about itself: you can see, or hear, why most Skylines wear drainpipe exhausts. The '90s were the intersection where car makers had figured out sound driving positions but had yet to start shrinking the glass area, so the Skyline is easy to place on the road. So far, so ordinary.

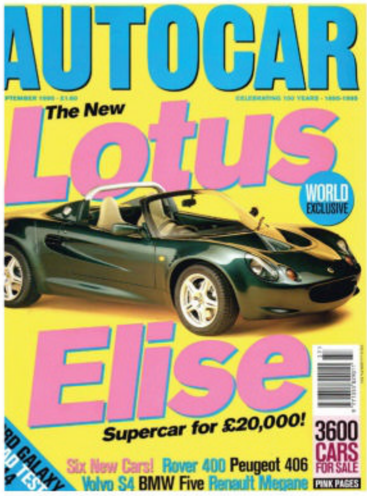
So you can imagine my surprise - and delight – when I get onto some better roads, squeeze the throttle out of a third-gear left and the rear end starts to swing wide, and again in the next right-hander. The steering is talking to me and, despite the firm suspension, the car is never unsettled over a bumpy B-road. Wind the engine up to 8000rpm (easy, because the six-speed manual doesn't have crazy-long gears), and while it's smooth and subtle, it shoves you forward with unrelenting urge. A modern Golf R may be just as quick across the ground, but it can't match the Skyline's engagement and fluidity. It couldn't be further from an inert video game; if anything, it feels analogue. But above all, it's a proper driver's car. **IV**

### NISSAN SKYLINE GT-R V-SPEC (R34)

**Price new** £53,819 (1999)
**Price now** £200,000 (2002/02, 50,000 miles)
**Engine** 6 cyls in line, 2568cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
**Power** 276bhp at 6800rpm
**Torque** 293lb ft at 4400rpm
**Gearbox** 6-spd manual, 4WD
**Kerb weight** 1605kg
**0-60mph** 4.6sec
**Top speed** 156mph

GT-R is communicative and engaging, despite its clever chassis tech

> *"The GT-R has competition-firm body control and rear-drive poise"*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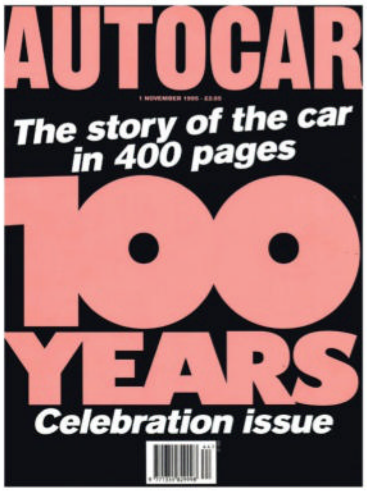
AUTOCAR

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100 YEARS

Celebration issue

All hail the Elise; a youthful James May; manhandling a McLaren; Handling Day is always a big draw; dawn of the NSX; centenary issue; “You’re all nicked!”; special access to the F1

’90s
Special

# Publish and be damned

The 1990s was a golden era for consumer publishing – and for car magazines in particular. **PATRICK FULLER** was in the thick of it

Anyone who enjoyed the recent BBC documentary on the birth of the groundbreaking lads’ mag Loaded may be surprised to hear that the 1990s was also the scene of a bloody battle for the soul of the car magazine.

True, it involved less debauchery, but there was plenty of subterfuge, egotism and tantrums – not to mention the incineration of millions of pounds as the three big specialist publishers fought to dominate one of the most lucrative magazine sectors.

In January 1993, I parked my ‘hospital’ blue Escort 1.3 Base in a side street as far from the Autocar & Motor office as possible (deliberately hidden because I didn’t want my new colleagues to judge me) and stepped into the rather large shoes of one James May. He had been fired when the national press picked up on a – shock, horror! – rude word the Autocar production team had embedded in the Christmas double issue, for which James carried the can.

He also carried a tape recorder into the meeting in which he was dismissed, immediately returning to his colleagues in the Autocar office to relive the tragi-comic moment. This act of defiance provided a hint at not only his future self on Top Gear but also the spirit of the car magazine sector at the time. This specialist media supertanker, which set sail with Autocar’s launch in 1895, was about to go to war with itself across the pages of Top Gear, Autocar, Max Power, Carweek, Auto Express, Car, Performance Car, Complete Car, What Car? and, finally, Evo. Three of them never made it back to base.

To understand how we got to this point, it is worth rewinding to the 1970s and the profound effect that Car magazine was having on the profitable – and complacent – weeklies of Autocar and Motor. With the likes of our very own Steve Cropley and Mel Nichols (later to become Autocar’s editorial director) at the helm, Car had regularly ‘stuck it up’ the weeklies with its ingenuity and scoops.

By the early 1980s, long-standing rivals Autocar and Motor were somehow being published by the same company, IPC, whose nickname ‘the Ministry of Magazines’ told you all you needed to know about their commitment to internal competition. Haymarket, which was already publishing What Car?, then acquired Autocar for £250,000 in 1984, and in 1988 it bought and closed Motor. Less than two years later, Auto Express was launched.

No surprise, then, that both the BBC and Car publisher Emap decided to pounce with new magazines of their own, resulting in a splurge of launches in 1993. And then things got interesting.

First, the BBC’s publishing partner, Redwood, which had just failed to buy Car, produced a dummy issue of a new magazine, Top Gear, with three competitive advantages: first, a great design, inspired by the women’s title Elle and conceived by Paul Harpin, who later became creative director of Haymarket; second, free advertising at the end of Top Gear TV episodes, which was manifestly unfair to everyone else; and third, the hard work of two people who were moonlighting from rival magazines in an act of subterfuge that, for some, still rankles today.

> “Autocar got bigger and glossier and full of great ideas”

Top Gear hit the shelves in October 1993 under editor Kevin Blick and with a cover that featured every new car on sale in the UK on the banking of the old Brooklands circuit in Surrey. The magazine cost £2.40 and had a ‘cover flap’ with a metal-effect finish that featured Quentin Willson at the top and Jeremy Clarkson at the bottom. The prize giveaway was an Escort Cosworth.

Meanwhile, Emap was working on two launches: the multimillion-pound Carweek, led by the decorated editor of Car, Gavin Green, and ‘Project Petrol’, the brainchild of Grahame Steed and which was launched as Max Power.

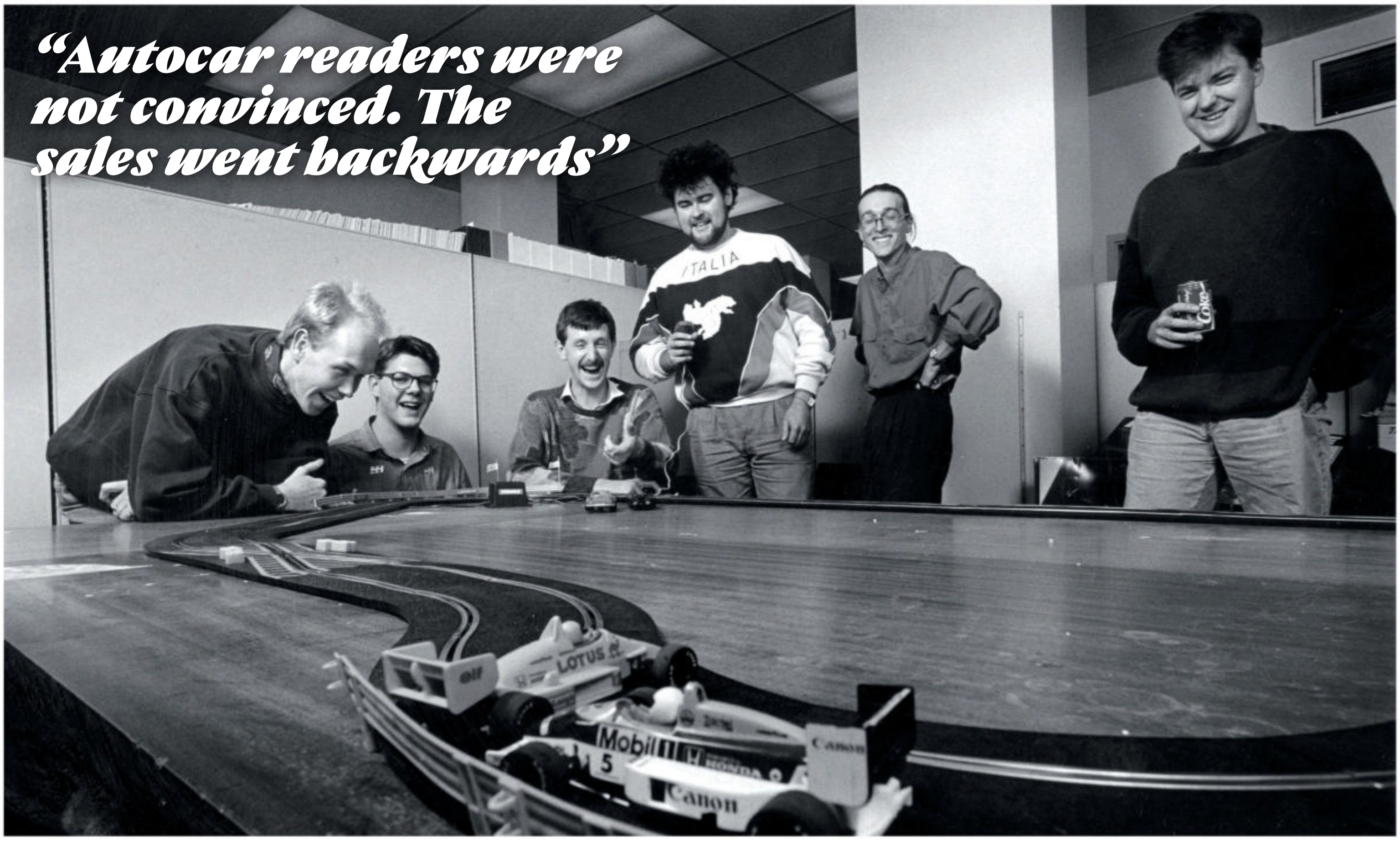
As we now know, the star of the show was not Carweek, which, despite a host of quality writers and the chance to win an Aston Martin DB7 in its £1 launch issue in August 1993, only survived 18 months. Instead, it was Max Power, which frankly did not make any sense to us car journalists when it appeared in April 1993, that went on to outsell everyone before closing in 2011.

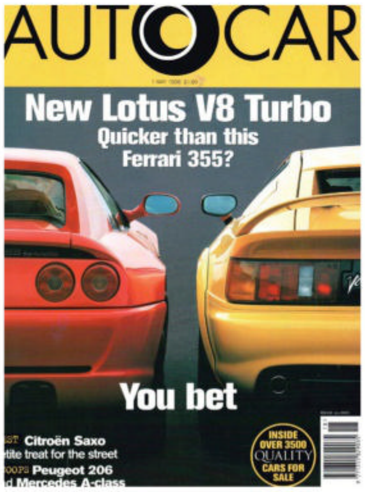
The new competition had a transformative effect on Autocar, which got bigger and glossier in 1994 and full of great ideas as it embraced the big-ticket car launches of the 1990s.

Truth be told, it was a great time to be a car journalist. As you will read elsewhere in this issue, the 1990s first brought us the Mazda MX-5, Jaguar XJ220, McLaren F1 and Honda NSX, then the Elise, MGF, XJ8 and S-Type, plus ever more brilliant 911s, M3s and M5s, the Ferrari 360 and F50, the Freelander, Discovery, new Range Rover, Audi TT, Cayenne, X5, Beetle and new Mini. Even the Rover 75 sent sales northwards. What could possibly go wrong?

The answer can be traced to something that became common in media circles at the time, namely ‘lifestyle’. There had been hints of it in car magazines for years, not least through ▸

*“Autocar readers were not convinced. The sales went backwards”*

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**Scalextric shootout; contentious masthead signposted a temporary change of direction; flying F1; a Caterham we made earlier; inspecting an F3000 car; weather never stops play**

## Top drawer, not top shelf: car mags of the ’90s

Top Gear
TOP OF THE POPS

### TOP GEAR
**Estimated launch issue sales** 180,000
**Publisher** BBC, Redwood
**What they said** “Even What Car? in jeans will sell if it gets free advertising on the BBC”

car
‘Just what makes a British car British?’

### CAR
**Estimated peak monthly sales** 140,000
**Publisher** Emap
**What they said** “Did for cars what Fever Pitch did for football”

WHAT CAR?
BABY MERC
We drive the new Benz at Escort money

### WHAT CAR?
**Peak monthly sales** 180,000
**Publisher** Haymarket
**What they said** “Never mind the entertainment, feel the data”

AUTOCAR
Baby Land Rover

### AUTOCAR
**Peak weekly sales** 100,000
**Publisher** Haymarket
**What they said** “The original and the best. But then we are biased”

Auto Express
NICE ONE SUNNY
WORTH THE HYPE?

### AUTO EXPRESS
**Estimated peak weekly sales** 100,000
**Publisher** Dennis Publishing
**What they said** “If Tesco did car magazines”

MAX POWER
THROBBING PURPLE MONSTER

### MAX POWER
**Estimated peak monthly sales** 200,000
**Publisher** Emap
**What they said** “No one likes us and we don’t care”

evo
3200GT Maserati

### EVO
**Estimated peak monthly sales** 30,000
**Publisher** Evo Publications
**What they said** “Who doesn’t love a 50,000-word drive story?”

◂ Performance Car columnist Clarkson, who had pioneered a blokey tone that was more akin to the emerging lad culture of Loaded, FHM et al. Max Power went several steps further, needling the establishment with its underground modded car cruises and something largely absent from car mags of the time: humour. How dare they.

As the magazines evolved, so did the focus of some advertisers, shifting from the bread and butter of ‘Vorsprung durch Technik’ to more brand-oriented concepts, where cars were associated with things that were inherently cooler, such as, you guessed it, lads’ mags. It was around this time that Autocar, hot on the heels of its 100th birthday, relaunched with a striking yellow masthead penned at great cost by Pentagram, a renowned design consultancy. Inside, the photos became less descriptive and more atmospheric, while the features section evolved into something more weird.

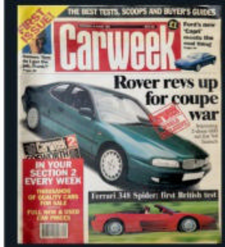
Autocar readers, accustomed to their weekly dose of car news and sport, were not convinced. The sales went backwards, and in less than 18 months the yellow masthead, known internally as ‘the flying arsehole’ (it was supposed to be a tyre), had been replaced by something altogether more traditional. The circulation recovered.

Autocar was not the only car magazine to suffer from this identity crisis. Emap, revelling in the soaring circulation of Max Power, decided to close Performance Car in 1998 because of a perceived lack of demand for traditional performance motoring content. The senior journalists on Performance Car, Richard Meaden and John Barker, thought otherwise, and, with the backing of farmer Harry Metcalfe and publisher Allan Pattison, they launched Evo in 1998 on a shoestring budget. Evo made the definitive case for the traditional car magazine in the mould of Car and Autocar, complete with high-quality writing and ‘photos you could frame’. It worked brilliantly.

The car media’s lifestyle experiment was not quite over, however. In a final twist, an independent magazine called Petrolhead was launched by Tony Middlehurst in 1998, complete with a fashion editor and the likes of Suzi Perry on the cover. It didn’t hang around for long, but it has had a lasting impact on the automotive media landscape, because it stopped the founder of PistonHeads, Dave Edmonston, from calling his groundbreaking website Petrolheads. And, believe it or not, Middlehurst still writes for PistonHeads to this day.

Patrick Fuller was editor of Autocar from 1997 until 2001

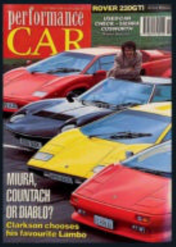
## Missing in action



### CARWEEK
**Estimated peak sales** 130,000
**Publisher** Emap
**What they said** “Blimey, they’re giving away a DB7”

CAR CHOICE
Twice as good?

### CAR CHOICE
**Estimated peak sales** 50,000
**Publisher** Haymarket
**What they said** “Conclusive proof there’s no display ad revenue in used cars”



### PERFORMANCE CAR
**Estimated peak sales** 35,000
**Publisher** Emap
**What they said** “We had that Jeremy Clarkson in the back of our mag once”

complete Car
BRIT PACK!

### COMPLETE CAR
**Estimated peak sales** 60,000
**Publisher** Motor-Presse
**What they said** “Germans make great cars, but magazines? Not so much”

PETROLHEAD
Suzi Perry

### PETROLHEAD
**Estimated peak sales** 10,000
**Publisher** Mediahead
**What they said** “Max Power for grown-ups. Of which there aren’t any”

’90s Special

# DC, rapid charger

David Coulthard reminisces about his rockin’ 1990s in Formula 1 with **DAMIEN SMITH** – and reveals what he really thinks of the sport today

Understudy to Alain Prost. Subbed in after the death of Ayrton Senna. Undermined by a returning Nigel Mansell. Teamed with and against Damon Hill in a Williams blessed by the Midas touch of Adrian Newey. And that was just the first three years.

At the time, it was all just life for young and promising David Coulthard. Now long retired at 53, established as an eloquent TV pundit and about to do it all again as a racing dad, the man universally known as DC has to admit: his 1990s kinda rocked.

“I recall testing with Prost [in 1993], looking over to his side of the garage and just thinking: how can my life be any better than this?” Coulthard tells me. “I’m test driving for the guy who was my hero watching BBC Two half-hour highlights with Murray Walker and James Hunt. An amazing period. Of course it was shit what happened at Imola 1994 [when Senna was killed in a crash], but that’s life. No one gets through it without tragedy. That was how my opportunity came about.”

Coulthard was a bright, rising star at the dawn of the 1990s. Promoted unexpectedly in those terrible circumstances, he had to accept sharing the #2 Williams car for the rest of 1994 with Mansell, who returned from Indycar for guest appearances. Coulthard took the drive full-time the following year, claimed his first grand prix win in Portugal, but left at season’s end for McLaren, following sticky contractual negotiations.

Shaded by double world champion team-mate Mika Häkkinen, Coulthard nevertheless remained at McLaren for nine seasons before seeing out his career at Red Bull. Instinctively he’s self-deprecating about his abilities, but the truth is that he was a very good grand prix driver.

The timing of his Formula 1 emergence spanned the last manual-gearbox F1 cars, in tests for Benetton and McLaren, before he found

himself as an unpaid tester for Williams at the height of the so-called 'gizmo era' in 1993.

"The 'active' Williams had power steering, ABS [anti-lock braking], traction control, fully automatic up-changes, full launch control – then that was all banned for 1994," he says. "So I got to experience the 'magic carpet' cars, the more raw F1 of 1994-1995, then went to McLaren."

More regulation changes designed to curb performance followed in 1998, via new narrow-track car dimensions and "shite" grooved tyres. Coulthard had to live with the compromised rubber all the way to the end of his F1 career.

"The sport very rarely listens to the drivers," he says. "Of course they did what they were supposed to do, which was reduce the contact patch, but getting the graining under control and leaving enough groove depth at the end of a race to keep them legal… what a load of faff to slow the cars down. It could have been done in another way."

The slick modern world of F1 exists in a different dimension to the raw, unvarnished sport that Coulthard grew up in, I suggest. "Yes and no," replies Coulthard. "I've been going to race tracks since I was a kid, and there's a familiarity whenever I go back to one."

Recently he returned to humble Pembrey in Wales for the first time since his days testing for Williams, to watch his 16-year-old son Dayton prepare for his first season in the British GB4 Championship. The essence of racing life doesn't change.

> **"Our race pace was faster than in modern F1, so the physicality was higher"**

"F1 has always been about technology and the fastest thing available at that time," he says. "Where we are now is a reflection of modern governmental influence [in terms of emissions legislation], whereas in the 1980s and 1990s, F1 did its thing, the automotive business did its thing, there would be crossover, such as carbonfibre, traction control and fuel efficiencies, but largely F1 was more of a marketing association than the technical collaboration it is today. That's the big change."

The physicality of driving F1 cars is different, too. Just watch old on-board footage from the 1990s compared with clips on today's ultra-smooth race tracks. "It's quite difficult to explain to today's generation," says Coulthard. "Ollie Bearman [the 19-year-old rookie driving for Haas] is probably looking at F1 as somewhat easier than Formula 2, because grand prix cars have power steering and F2 doesn't. Power steering is like a light going on for racing drivers.

"I asked him about Saudi Arabia last year when he stepped into the Ferrari for his F1 debut and the biggest thing was his neck, because he wasn't used to that level of g-force over a long period of time. But if you go back to the 1990s, when we had in-race refuelling, our relative race pace was closer to a qualifying time, so the physicality in the races was higher than in modern F1.

"In reaction to the 2023 Qatar GP, when a few drivers were overheating, we now have all these nice [cooling] bodysuits to make sure our highly paid racing drivers aren't working too hard… It's just a reflection of modern society, isn't it?

"I loved the grands prix when I was physically and mentally spent at the end of them, because it made me feel like a GP driver. When I watch those videos of Senna at Suzuka or Monaco, that is an amazing feat of driving skill and physical prowess. Today they are amazing drivers, and every generation should be better. Arguably ▸

**Coulthard has remained a Red Bull ambassador since retiring in 2008**

GETTY IMAGES / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

*“Getting knocked out was a revelation: I didn’t have to worry about being killed”*

Coulthard was just 23 when he made his unexpected F1 debut

◂ Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton are the best there has ever been. But physically they’re in a comfort zone that wasn’t there in the 1980s and 1990s.”

F1 seems less intimidating for new drivers today than it was for Coulthard’s generation. “Just getting out of the garage without stalling used to be a badge of honour because the foot clutches were pretty raw,” he says. “I don’t want to be the guy who says it was more difficult then, but speak to Fernando [Alonso] and Lewis, who have tried those older cars. Don’t take my word for it; take it from them.”

There’s a general perception that the ‘gizmo cars’, with all their driver aids, were easy. Allan McNish, who tested for Benetton at the height of that era, refutes the charge: the aids raised the performance level, he says, but living on the limit still separated the great from the good.

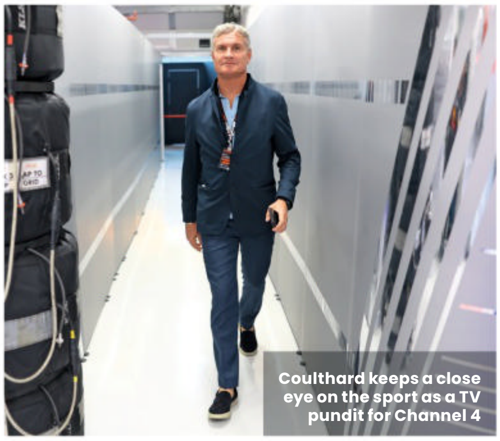
“I remember testing at Imola with full active suspension and ABS, and that night my head was in my soup,” recalls Coulthard. “My neck was f***ed. Every time you braked it was a sledgehammer in the back of the head. I had servo on the brakes as well, so you didn’t even have to push the pedal that hard to get 100% of its potential, and I had ABS, which doesn’t mean shorter braking; you’re just not flat-spotting tyres where the limit is.”

He comes back to power steering: “The most difficult cars were those without it. I remember testing [famously arm-strong] Mansell’s Williams

**Coulthard made 246 F1 starts between 1994 and 2008, scoring 12 pole positions, 13 wins and 62 podiums. He was runner-up to Michael Schumacher in 2001.**

Safety is the aspect of F1 that has improved most since his first win in 1995

Coulthard's best years were at McLaren in the late 1990s and early 2000s



Coulthard keeps a close eye on the sport as a TV pundit for Channel 4

"Are you trying to f***ing kill me?" Schumacher raged after hitting DC in 1998

## Coulthard's 'boring' Le Mans win

Before his Formula 1 career took off, David Coulthard tried something different, just the once. His Le Mans 24 Hours record reads: one start, one class win and one disqualification.

Coulthard was a late call-up in 1993 to Tom Walkinshaw's squad to race one of the decade's great supercars, a Jaguar XJ220, with David Brabham and John Nielsen.

When during a pit stop the car fell off its jacks and onto Brabham's foot, the young rookie was left with more driving time than he expected. Nursing a gearbox problem and forced to conserve fuel, Coulthard has described his Le Mans driving experience as "boring" – although standing on the podium as a GT class winner for Jaguar remains a special memory.

A week later, the car was disqualified for missing its catalytic converter. Coulthard wasn't too bothered – and he kept the winners' trophy.

at Estoril: at the fast turn two, you had one attempt at putting on steering lock, and whatever you got, that was your profile for the corner. Nigel liked a very small steering wheel too. I got to a point and that was as far as I could turn it, so that decided my speed through the corner."

One happy advance in F1 since the 1990s has been safety. Never mind cockpit halos: Coulthard's shoulders were fully exposed in the 1994 FW16. Again, a different dimension to the one that his son is entering. Yet fear of death was something Coulthard rationalised early on, in a manner that gets to the heart of what separates racing drivers from the rest of us.

"I crashed a Williams in testing at Silverstone, got knocked out, and it was a revelation," he says. "I realised if I was ever killed in a racing car, the moment when the lights go out wouldn't be filled with fear. When I was about to crash, my head was full of doing what you do to minimise the damage. The only difference from being knocked out and being killed is you wake up from being knocked out. So I didn't have to worry about being killed.

"I tried to explain that to my mother, got halfway through and she squealed: 'Stop, stop, stop!' Now, having stood at the side of kart tracks with my son wondering why I'm supporting him, of course you don't want them to be hurt, but what can you do? You have to support them, don't you? So yes, I'm happy he's racing in this era."

"I don't want to be that guy who says 'it was better in my day', but I'm very happy with the era in which I raced," he continues. "The sport is bigger today; as a result, the values and salaries are higher. But I've seen Gary Lineker talk about his salary when he was playing [from 1978-1994] versus modern Premier League footballers. You have to live for your time and, being a father, you want the next generation to be better. Evolution has left us a trail to suggest that is the case."

Coulthard approves of where F1 finds itself now, although, speaking to us a couple of days after F1's inaugural season launch extravaganza at the $O_2$ Arena in London, he makes it clear what he thinks about fining racing drivers for swearing: "The crowd's [booing] reaction to the FIA would suggest this isn't a golden era of governance, that the public feels there's meddling in the raw emotion of what these gladiators do out on track."

"But we will look back on this time as a golden era," he continues. "There's a golden generation right now of young, handsome, fast racing drivers in their prime – and we've got the outliers of Fernando and Lewis in their forties, to be a reference point for the brilliant young racing drivers who you and I are going to talk about for the next decade and more."

Coulthard was capable of beating F1 champions on his day

GETTY IMAGES / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

**’90s Special**

LOTUS ELISE

7 steps to heaven

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

## Matt Prior

The 1990s was my formative motoring decade: from my first car magazine purchase to my first drive, my first crash and my car-based degree. Throughout, there was one car I loved above all others: the Caterham Seven, whose brochure (including Autocar extracts) I thumbed relentlessly. A couple of months out of the ’90s (sorry), I finally bought one.

The Autocar Road Test

The Great British Sports Car

Caterham 7 K-series

The 110bhp Rover-powered lightweight is just as much fun as the shatteringly quick HPC. In some ways it's even better

## Steve Cropley

I still think of September 1995 as the date modern, practical sports cars began. That was when we revealed the first official pictures of the Lotus Elise, whose brilliance as a driver’s car and an ownership proposition was made instantly obvious by the images. At the time, design boss Julian Thomson was amazingly modest about what he and his little team had achieved, and he remains so today. But it’s hard to think of a car that has lived such a good life and still looks and works so well today. I’ve owned two Elise S1s in the intervening years, and when I look at those launch pictures, I wonder why on earth I don’t have one now.

# Magic moments: the 1990s remembered

### From write-offs to rip-offs, our team recall their most enduring memories

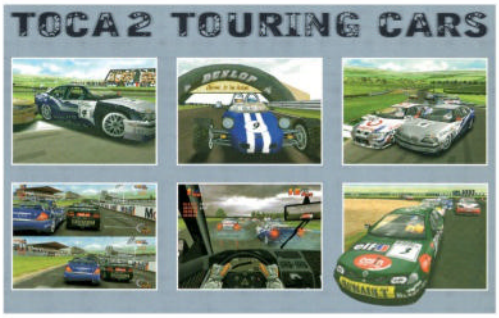
GETTY IMAGES

## James Attwood

Being a Damon Hill fan wasn’t always easy, mostly because – and please whisper this to avoid enraging my 1990s self – he wasn’t as good as arch-rival Michael Schumacher. But blind fandom always won out. I still vividly recall sitting on my sofa in the small hours watching the 1994 Australian Grand Prix, a title showdown of pure drama. Schumacher was leading, but suddenly he was off track and had tagged the wall. Damon was closing in. This could happen. This is going to happen! And then… Well, you know what happened. Still, we’ll always have 1996, when Murray Walker got that lump in his throat.

## Mark Tisshaw

All of my miles in the 1990s were done sitting in my bedroom. The young me was inseparable from my PlayStation, racing games nearly always the choice. Destruction Derby was the first I remember, but the real standouts were TOCA 2 Touring Cars (better than the first one) and Gran Turismo 2 (likewise). I’d back myself to still navigate the menus blindfolded to find my way onto the grid on both games, relying on the sound effects in the menus alone – which is probably about as cool as it sounds. A couple of years ago I bought an old PlayStation once again and fired up the TOCA 2 disc I found. It was much harder than I remembered…



## Damien Smith

British Formula Ford, 1998. There was this sunny 18-year-old kid, hot out of karts, with a funny name: Jenson Button. Raw and error-prone but fast – and a match for more experienced, precocious Van Diemen ace Dan Wheldon. Wheldon was ruthless, leaving Button ashen-faced and furious after one edgy duel at Snetterton. But Button had the last laugh: he was crowned British champion. Then the Big One, the Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch. In the final, into Clearways on the last lap, Button blocked, Wheldon slithered into the gravel and Boy Wonder clinched the double. A star was born.

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16
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## Matt Saunders

It's September 1999, and a wide-eyed yours truly is heading off to fresher's week at the University of Wales, Bangor. I've had a driving licence for less than a year but have yet to inherit Grandad's old Triumph Acclaim, so I'll spend my first year at uni as a pedestrian. A year when it will rain. A lot.

But before all that, my old man packs the Range Rover 2.5 Turbo D with a bedroom's worth of kit and clobber and duly demonstrates how best to tackle the old A5, as it snakes its way through Snowdonia, at a fairly committed pace – but not so quick that my old '486' PC tower unit falls over in the boot, or that we're distracted from the spectacular scenery.

To this day, for sentimental reasons perhaps, that remains one of my favourite drives and favourite memories – and it's still one of my favourite roads. Every time I go back, it's always the old man I think about. Thanks, Dad. And to think I nearly went to uni in Norwich instead.

The Autocar Group Test

RS Cosworth vs HF Integrale vs Sunny GTI-R

Ace under pressure

Ford's cracking newcomer and a scorching Nissan put the hitherto all-conquering Lancia, in latest guise, under pressure

## Andrew Frankel

Tracks criss-crossing in the snow, my tracks, paying out beyond the windscreen at 90mph like monochromatic streamers in a gale. This is interesting. Two things occur: first, they're getting closer to the edge of the road, and second, shouldn't these tracks not really be behind the car? I'm looking for an answer, but instead it is another question that forms slowly in my mind. Could it be that I'm travelling backwards and about to write off the first Lancia Integrale Evo into the country? It could be. And I did.

## John Evans

'Back to Russia with love' punned the Autocar headline. The story was just that: me driving an old Lada Riva to Hull for its return to the motherland. It was 1995, and I'd heard Russians wanted their old saloons back, so, hoping to turn a profit, I bought a 10-year-old one and drove it from London to Hull, planning to sell it to an exporter. However, when I arrived, nerves frayed and he would only give me what I'd paid for it: £175. Almost 250 miles from home, what choice had I? I parked it at the port among other Rivas destined for St Petersburg, took his cash and grabbed a lift home in the photographer's Escort RS2000. Alternative headline? I preferred 'To Hull and back'.

## Porsche Boxster (986)

A howling flat six, celery-crisp steering and stunning wide-hipped looks – they can all be yours from just £3000. Of course, the cheapest Boxsters are best avoided, but the truth is that these are surprisingly hardy little roadsters – provided you buy carefully.

Its best-known Achilles is the intermediate-shaft (IMS) bearing, which in some cases fractures or even shatters after a long and hard life. This then throws off the engine’s timing and shunts pistons into valves, requiring a really rather expensive rebuild.

Thankfully, many examples’ bearings have already been replaced, and typically with a sturdier aftermarket item that isn’t prone to exploding. If it hasn’t been done, add another £800 or so to the car’s price, if you get it done alongside a new clutch – which you probably should.

It’s also worth checking the immobiliser, locks and alarms work as intended: blocked door seals or a leaky roof can mean the ECU (located under the driver’s seat) gets wet and dies. Replacements are £500-plus.

Still, it’s easy to snag a good ’un – and you absolutely should, before prices soar.

# Second-hand stars:

Prices for legends like the Honda NSX and Lancia Delta Integrale have soared,

## Volkswagen Corrado VR6

Volkswagen’s junior coupé was always a tidy steer, but its full potential wasn’t unleashed until 1992. The fitment of a potent 2.9-litre narrow-angle V6 made it the fastest front-driver of the day, and it somehow improved the handling compared with the smaller (but turbocharged) four-pot.

Every Corrado was made from galvanised steel, so they hold up better against rust than many rivals – and it’s a good indicator of a dodgy repair, which should be easy to spot.

High-milers go for around £6000, but you shouldn’t be scared off by that: these are generally reliable bona fide modern classics.

## Vauxhall Calibra 4x4 Turbo

Early Calibras were tarnished with a reputation for being a bit too much like the Cavalier on which they were based. The 4x4 Turbo flipped that notion on its head, turning what was a slightly humdrum coupé into Britain’s cheapest 150mph car. Today, though, they’re an expensive window onto the past, with prices venturing well into five figures.

## Honda Integra Type R

This was the car that really put the Type R name on the map when it landed here in 1998, thanks to an all-time-great engine and tremendous handling. Clean cars go for about £15k, but it's also worth considering importing one from Japan while the yen's value is low.

## Rover 220 Turbo

"Nasty steering, a vague gearchange, dubious handling and dead-feeling brakes," we said back then, pulling no punches. The 220 may not be a good car to drive, but it has an intangible appeal as the plucky underdog. These are now incredibly rare and prices vary wildly, but around £5000 should be enough to secure one in mint condition.

## BMW 328i (E36)

"The hardest-hitting, least compromised all-rounder on sale for less than £30,000," is what we reckoned of the 328i back in 1995. Much of the same remains true today, except you can snag one for one-tenth of the as-new asking price. Many have led hard lives, though – these were sub-£1000 cars for a long time – so buy carefully.

## Fiat Coupé

A Chris Bangle masterpiece, and not half bad to drive either.

The five-cylinder 20-valve engine, offered in both naturally aspirated and turbocharged forms, has the most exotic feel, but the four-cylinder option, a descendant of the Delta Integrale powerplant, still has the means to entertain.

Rust is by far the biggest issue: inspect the sills, subframes, wheel arches, footwells, boot floor, exhaust… Basically, just give the whole thing a thorough going-over. Interior plastics are prone to developing a horrid sticky finish, too. Running project cars can be found for £500, but the best examples are north of £10,000.

# best buys of the '90s

but there are '90s bargains out there. **CHARLIE MARTIN** trawls the small ads

## Toyota MR2 (SW20)

Forget the second-generation MR2's reputation for having a wayward tail – we never thought that held very much water. Still, Toyota revised the model no fewer than five times, with updates two (in 1991) and three (1993) gradually softening the handling to tune out the risk of snap oversteer. Any MR2 is a great drive and a fairly reliable proposition, barring rust or any extensive modifications.

It's worth seeking out a Japanese-import Turbo model or one with the atmospheric 'Beams' engine that came with Yamaha-developed cylinder heads; either example brings with it the soundtrack and performance the car's chassis and looks deserve. Such cars will set you back around £10,000.

## Mercedes-Benz SL (R129)

Technically speaking, the R129's life started in the late 1980s, but the fourth-generation SL didn't really hit the limelight until a few years later. Its sheer desirability – thanks in no small part to those futuristic lines and stonking £50k-plus price tag – made it the darling of the burgeoning hip-hop subculture. And if you can picture yourself rollin' in a 500 Benz, just like Tupac, the good news is that SLs are today shockingly affordable. Just £3000 gets you behind the wheel of a ropey car, but we'd budget £10,000 or so for something more dependable.

Engines ranged from a 2.8-litre V6 all the way up to a 7.3-litre V12 fettled by AMG (good luck finding one of those), but our pick was the grunty 5.0-litre V8, badged 500 SL.

Look out for an original car with a good service history, and you shouldn't encounter too many issues. A hard-top roof is a desirable extra for the colder months, but the standard soft-top should prove adequate, providing it's been properly looked after (or replaced in the relatively recent past with an official Mercedes-Benz part).

## Renault Twingo

The Twingo has aged like Mr Blobby: once a tad unsightly, but now remembered for flouting convention and embracing the absurd. In the Twingo's favour, it didn't single-handedly traumatise a generation of children, so it's looked back on a bit more fondly. You can occasionally find them from £5k, but it's perhaps easier to source and import a clean car yourself.

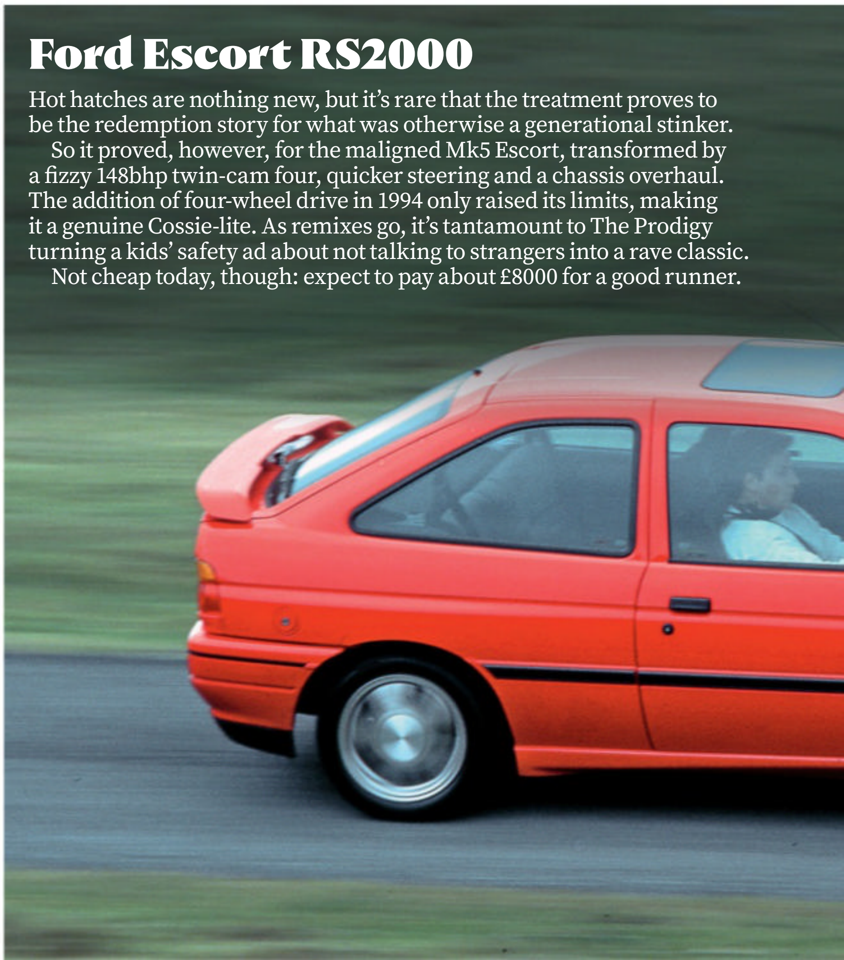
## BMW Z3

If it's a pure driver's car you want, look elsewhere. But the Z3 has otherwise aged tremendously, with long-nosed, low-slung proportions and – as long as you go for the 2.0-litre engine or bigger – some of BMW's greatest straight-six lumps. Prices – from £1000 – are on the up, so now is the time to buy.

## Peugeot 306 GTi

"The GTi is back," declared our road testers after sampling the performance-enhanced 306. For years, hot hatchbacks had been iced over, hamstrung by horrendous insurance premiums and the looming threat of theft. But the French machine's combination of a 167bhp four-pot (then one of the most powerful engines to have featured in a hatch), a six-speed gearbox (when most rivals made do with five ratios) and a simply stunning chassis raised the bar. Suddenly, the race was back on.

Avoid track-converted cars; clean examples should start at £5000 or so.



## Ford Escort RS2000

Hot hatches are nothing new, but it's rare that the treatment proves to be the redemption story for what was otherwise a generational stinker.

So it proved, however, for the maligned Mk5 Escort, transformed by a fizzy 148bhp twin-cam four, quicker steering and a chassis overhaul. The addition of four-wheel drive in 1994 only raised its limits, making it a genuine Cossie-lite. As remixes go, it's tantamount to The Prodigy turning a kids' safety ad about not talking to strangers into a rave classic.

Not cheap today, though: expect to pay about £8000 for a good runner.

## Peugeot 106 GTi

All the joy of the 306 GTi, but in a smaller, lighter and slipperier package. The 106 GTi was as close as Peugeot ever came to properly replacing the 205 GTi, and today a good example can fetch a five-figure sum. At that price, though, you should also consider the 106 Rallye, which went without power steering and much of the cabin kit in pursuit of pure driving thrills.

## Ford Focus

The Focus was the car that righted all the later wrongs of its Escort predecessor and democratised the attributes of all the best driver's cars. Ignore the ST and the eye-wateringly expensive RS, and instead look for a tidy Zetec petrol that has managed to elude the tin worm. Just a few thousand pounds should snag one you can enjoy for years to come.

## BMW 8 Series

Munich's Icarus was too heavy and too blunt in its responses to be a proper grand tourer, and it cost around the same money as Mercedes' SL. But in 1993 the tide began to turn with the introduction of the 850CSi. It was an M car in all but name, with its V12 engine upsized and boosted to a hearty 375bhp so the 8 could finally provide a driving experience that lived up to its gorgeous looks.

It's also worth considering the later 4.4-litre 840Ci, which finally felt like the 8 Series had become a proper GT car. Prices for the 8 Series start at around £10,000, but CSis are now hitting £50,000-plus.

’90s Special

# Sweet petite

In the 1990s, soaring insurance costs put paid to affordable hot hatch fun. But luckily, says **STEPHEN DOBIE,** the French had a trick up their sleeve

**PHOTOGRAPHY** JACK HARRISON

The 1990s wasn't the friendliest environment for hot hatchbacks. The previous decade had bred some of the genre's biggest icons, but an epidemic of thefts and spiralling insurance costs began to stifle car makers' swagger. The Golf GTI, a pioneer of the formula, was softened in its third generation, while the Escort Cosworth's irresistibility to more than its paying customers meant Ford's follow-ups lost their lustre too.

Thankfully, towards the decade's close, rescue came from a reliable source of inexpensive fun: the French. The cars you see here were not only dinky in size and affordable, but their running costs were also attainable by everyday folk. The Citroën Saxo VTS was flung to the top of the hot hatch sales charts by its now ludicrous-sounding free insurance deals, which, allied to its slim list price, lured in a younger demographic than that of the new car norm.

The Peugeot 106 GTi was a bit less bargain-bucket in its approach, but it is rumoured to have lowered its premiums another way. While the pair share the same genes, right down to identical four-cylinder engines, there was a minor gulf in their performance figures – chiefly the 106 taking half a second longer to hit 60mph than its non-identical twin. The internet is awash with speculation about why that was the case, but the pair claim identical gear ratios, quelling any suggestions the Saxo could hit the accelerative benchmark with just one gearchange. That only throws more weight behind the old wives' theory that Peugeot started the stopwatch with more ballast on board in order to sandbag its car into a lower insurance group.

Either way, these are both joyously simple devices at their core. Each deploys a 120bhp 1.6-litre 16-valve naturally aspirated four-cylinder engine that is allied to a short-stacked five-speed manual gearbox and powering the front wheels bereft of complicated electronics or intelligent differential set-ups to interrupt the process. Their suspension set-ups are a mix of off-the-shelf struts, trailing arms and a torsion bar.

Their exterior designs don't feel too far from the regular parts locker, either: there are no wider tracks or requisite swelled arches, no muscular bonnet humps or indeed much you would describe as 'bodykit'. Their 14in alloys look delightfully restrained now but surely acted as placeholders for 1990s buyers itching to redeem their Demon Tweeks gift card. It's small wonder cars such as these were quickly modified to the hilt, no doubt tearing those noble insurability claims into tatters.

That does, however, make it ever trickier to hunt down examples that haven't been tuned, crashed or eaten by corrosion. The pair we have here must be among Britain's very best remaining examples of each, and they both represent the apples of their respective owner's eye. The 1999 106 GTi has joined us from South Wales, where Carl Lampard has kept it for seven years, fully repainting it in its dazzling Sundance Yellow during a restoration to borderline brand-new condition. Everything, down ▸

Peugeot's and Citroën's pared-back takes on the hot hatch theme still hit the spot today

◂ to its official 106 GTi mats, looks as standard as the day it was born.

The 1997 Saxo VTS driven up from the south coast by Zac Jiggins is more demure still, a very early Quartz Silver car lacking even a rear spoiler to hint at any aggression beneath. He has owned his Citroën for five years, and it arrives in front of photographer Jack's camera fresh from an engine rebuild to ensure it feels as factory-fit as it looks. Both Carl and Zac appear too young to have lusted after these cars new but, crucially, they're pouring their time and money into faithfully maintaining their original condition now. A true antithesis to the clientele who could have got their modifying mitts on these cars new.

Two special cars, then, ensuring today isn't about cutting the same outlandish shapes as Tiff Needell on Autocar's £15,000 performance mega-test around Rockingham in 2003, when these cars laid waste to some huge names to finish fourth and fifth out of 25 cars. Yep, 25 sub-£15k cars. You can barely get a base-spec Dacia for £15k now.

While the Saxo nipped ahead of the 106 on that occasion, the pair exchanged places in our affections across their six years on sale to hammer home with conviction just how closely related they are beneath their skin. Yet flick through any period magazine and you will discover they offered quite different driving experiences: the Citroën is more agile, exciting and occasionally wayward, while the Peugeot operates with a mite more professionalism to serve up even greater thrills (at least on the road) with its greater breadth of ability in all conditions. What united them both were lap times that outgunned more muscular competition: their flyweight physiques, keenly revving engines and hyperactive handling propelled them around racetracks with the startled energy of a fly stuck in a hot room.

Once again, the truth behind their handing differences is argued at length online, but the debate appears to focus on the 106 getting grippier tyres from the factory – and there are plenty of forum anecdotes of both cars exhibiting frenzied (or downright frightening) lift-off oversteer during ownership. Today, we have a grubby British morning to ride their waves of excitement and see how they each stack up almost 30 years after their respective launches.

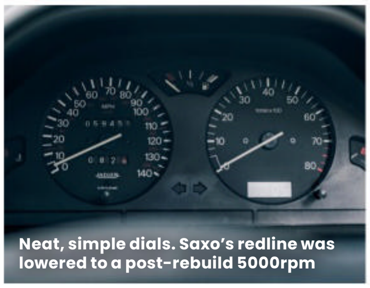
What they both share is an upright driving position and a cramped, offset pedal box. That you can still heel and toe with such a tiny throttle is a credit to the sharpness and accuracy of the controls beneath your feet. They possess similar steering wheels too, each perfectly proportioned and sited ahead of an attractive set of Jaeger dials with alternative colour schemes. Cute immobiliser keypad aside, the Saxo cuts a more modern dashboard aesthetic, while the 106 visibly shares vents and controls with Peugeots from a decade before to betray the fact that GTi trim arrived with the 106's mid-life facelift, while the Saxo was fresh on the market.

I begin in the Peugeot, its hardened four-cylinder soundtrack and vibrant paint ensuring it buzzes down the road like an

“Both of them demonstrate the endless benefits of making a car light and agile”

PSA's 1.6-litre four is common to both, although claimed 0-60s differ mysteriously

Driving position is upright and the pedal box cramped in both the 106 and Saxo


Neat, simple dials. Saxo's redline was lowered to a post-rebuild 5000rpm

Clock the difference: 106 GTi has done 91,000 miles to the Saxo's 59,000

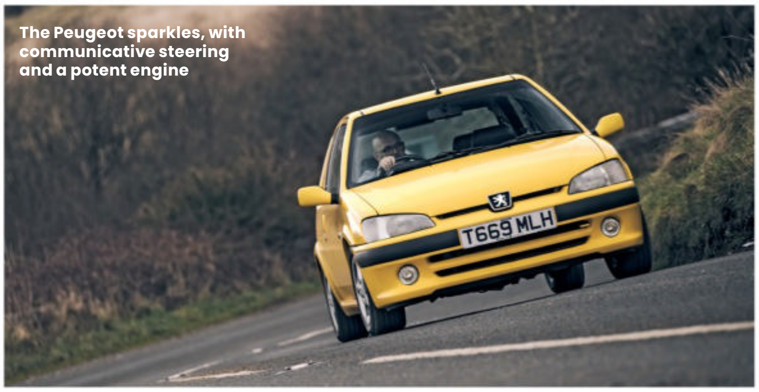
angry little hornet. Its steering is quick, alert and full of feel, while its modest 107lb ft of torque vastly over-delivers with less than a tonne to propel. The gearshift is a little notchy and a far cry from the slicker shifts we've enjoyed in more modern and sophisticated hatches since, but the GTi is already a delightful palate cleanser that still feels quick enough to be relevant.

True to form, the Saxo is immediately more agile. It points so incisively into corners that you're almost caught off guard, while the rear wheels lighten with just a hint of a relaxed throttle. With more aggression, you can sense its bum poised to pivot round at the point the 106 is still working its grip more evenly across all four wheels. This is in mostly dry conditions, but were there more rain, I sense a perkier, perhaps meaner streak, is lurking within the VTS.

Yet it's probably more addictive as a result, a live wire in which it is hard to resist upping your game while at the wheel. It charges hard even with a polite 5000rpm cap to avoid punishing Zac's refreshed engine, and it eagerly matches the Peugeot's enthusiasm. The Citroën has the smoother, neater gearshift of the pair and feels the more refined and finessed car to operate, despite the potential mischief barely concealed beneath.

Both of them proudly demonstrate the endless benefits of making a car small, light and agile, and while they probably wouldn't impress the Euro NCAP testers now, each has airbags, ABS and luxuries such as electric windows and power steering to prove they were always value propositions rather than outright cheap. Each rides well on its 185/55 tyres and is narrow and nimble enough to snick around potholes anyway, negotiating the worst of broken British B-roads in its own inimitable way. On quicker asphalt they will both buzz away above 3000rpm during a 70mph cruise, and you'd need a strong resolve to daily one now – not least because you'd be exposing an appreciating asset to the grit and grime of a British winter.

The Saxo VTS is the flamboyant extrovert, a car that's truly got under my skin on these tight Somerset lanes, while the 106 GTi is the more precise and accurate device, though still emboldened with a sense of humour. It feels like it would make a superior circuit toy, allowing you to bombilate around your local track evening without spending a fortune on fuel and tyres – not to mention doing so while embarrassing quicker and pricier cars in the process, just like this pair of French fancies did in those turn-of-the-century track tests. Ultimately these saviours of the affordable hot hatch remain enticing for more than simply their valour. I'll take one of each.


The Peugeot sparkles, with communicative steering and a potent engine

The Saxo's agility borders on the flighty: lift-off in a turn and the tail twitches

## *What about an encore?*

These two cars are evidence that Stellantis's current predilection for sharing its parts is decades-old from its PSA days: the 106 and Saxo are spookily similar beneath the skin. How likely is it that we will see modern-day interpretations? Citroën is decidedly unsporting nowadays and has been for a long time. Its current range is heading down a rugged, value-for-money avenue seemingly to lay blows on Dacia.

Peugeot, though, is finally ready for a GTi revival. New Peugeot boss Alain Favey recently doubled down on hints he made shortly after taking the role, saying: "We will reintroduce GTi on the e-208 as soon as possible. We want to continue to nurture the reputation of the brand for driving sensations. I am very eager to connect Peugeot with what it stood for in its past."

Expect an e-208 GTi to share underpinnings with Abarth's 600e, with 237bhp (or more), front-wheel drive and a mechanical limited-slip differential.

| | 1999 PEUGEOT 106 GTi | 1997 CITROEN SAXO VTS |
|---|---|---|
| Price then | £12,195 | £11,995 |
| Price now | From £5000 | From £5000 |
| Engine | 4 cyls in line, 1587cc, petrol | 4 cyls in line, 1587cc, petrol |
| Power | 120bhp at 6600rpm | 120bhp at 6600rpm |
| Torque | 107lb ft at 5200rpm | 107lb ft at 5200rpm |
| Gearbox | 5-spd manual, FWD | 5-spd manual, FWD |
| Kerb weight | 961kg | 975kg |
| 0-62mph | 8.2sec | 7.7sec |
| Top speed | 127mph | 127mph |

Thanks to Zac and Carl for the loan of their cars, plus the Citroën and Peugeot owners' communities who helped us find them

The British motorsport landscape had never seen anything like the boom time of the British Touring Car Championship through the 1990s. International drivers and manufacturer-backed programmes flocked to the UK to battle it out for what had become the most prestigious tin-top series on the planet.

The domestic series had seen the writing on the wall for saloon car racing before anyone else and set a trend that, ultimately, the rest of the world followed for a glorious decade. At its peak, there were 10 manufacturer-supported teams in the BTCC, robust television coverage and a phalanx of international stars all chasing the British accolade.

It was a long journey from the decade before. In the 1980s, tin-top racing had been fought out between cars of different specifications and engine capacities all scrapping for honours on the same track. The champion could come from any one of those intra-class fights, and it had been that way since the British Saloon Car Championship was first contested in 1958.

In 1990, four of the leading players in the competition sat down to map out a future in which it would embrace a changing world: David Richards, who was running the BMW programme with his Prodrive operation; Dave Cook, who was in charge of the works Vauxhall team; Andy Rouse, a master engineer and four-time BTCC champion with strong links to Ford; and leading privateer Vic Lee.

The result was a 2.0-litre-only format. In the days of Filofaxes and the first attainable mobile phones, fleet cars were like gold to road car makers, so this was a rich seam for the BTCC to mine when looking for a style of machine that would appeal to the mass-market manufacturers.

There was another consideration too: the BBC had committed to covering the series in 1988 and the highlights packages that appeared on its flagship Grandstand TV programme were beginning to gain traction with a wider audience. A simpler-to-follow format for broadcasting was a major added bonus.

With the brains behind the revolution all running their own teams, Australian Alan Gow was put in charge of overseeing the introduction of the new rules and guiding the newly founded organisational body TOCA in the right direction.

The new-formula cars first appeared in 1990 alongside the outgoing Group A-specification machines before a fully unified field of 2.0-litre cars took to the starting grid at the beginning of 1991. The success was huge, and it wasn't long before the global rule makers took notice. In 1993, motorsport's global governing body, the FIA, adopted the UK's regulations and named them Super Touring. This British creation

’90s Special

# World in motion

New rules formulated by the BTCC for 1991 created a golden era of racing that attracted global attention. **MATT JAMES** looks back on Super Touring went on to dominate the world.

"When we started out with it, of course we didn't know it would go around the planet and become what it did. It was only ever devised as a British set of regulations, so you can't really call it some kind of masterplan!" says Gow.

Because the rules were initially for the UK only, any potential manufacturer wouldn't have to go to international governors to rubber-stamp and ratify a competition car. That meant that the UK arm of each manufacturer had an achievable motorsport programme within its remit for the first time.

"It opened up the series to those who didn't want to spend huge amounts on getting their cars homologated," continues Gow. "The prevailing direction for road car firms at the time was 2.0 litres, and that's why that option was chosen. It simplified everything, it cleared the way for manufacturers to enter and, as a by-product, it made the racing simpler for the TV viewers to understand. The car that crossed the line ▸

Mobil
VAUXHALL
Agip

# The standout cars

**BMW 318is (1992-1994)**
The BMW 318is had big shoes to fill. The original Prodrive-built BMW M3 race car had been a staple of the 2.0-litre undercard in the BTCC for almost five years when the revolution happened, and BMW was already an active player in tin-top racing on the global scene. It put its weight behind a refreshed 'E36' 3 Series saloon, which met the new rules head on.

**Volvo 850 Estate (1994)**
The Tom Walkinshaw Racing-created 850 Estate was a curio in on-track terms but really ramped up the publicity for Volvo. Veteran Jan Lammers and rising star Rickard Rydell were at the controls of the car, which unsurprisingly was prevented from really hitting the sweet spot by the excess weight at its rear. It was replaced by an 850 saloon for 1995.

**Alfa Romeo 155 TS (1994-1995)**
This Italian heartthrob was already ripping up the tracks in Europe when Alfa Romeo decided to turn its attentions to the burgeoning British series in 1994. Factory-blessed preparations outfit Alfa Corse brought two Italian drivers in Gabriele Tarquini and Giampiero Simoni and a trick 155 TS saloon that had bent some homologation rules. It dominated the season.

**Audi A4 Quattro (1995-1997)**
Ever the innovator, Audi decided to broaden its horizons from European competition and tackle the BTCC in 1995. German Frank Biela took the crown in its A4 saloon, which, unlike any other machine on the grid, was boosted by four-wheel drive. Arguments ensued and the Audi was given a weight penalty, but it was too late to rein it in.

**Renault Laguna (1994-1999)**
To show just how far the BTCC had come, Renault co-opted the Williams Grand Prix Engineering F1 team to devise its new tin-top racer for 1994. Out went the ungainly 19 and in came the new Laguna hatchback. With F1 input at its roots, it became one of the most complete packages on the grid. Alain Menu of Switzerland cantered to the crown in 1997.

**Ford Mondeo V6 (2000)**
We're squeezing this one into a '90s special because it was the ultimate expression of a BTCC car under the Super Touring regulations. The Prodrive-built Mondeo dominated the final year of the class in the UK. It was a money-no-object machine that took 12 months to refine but won almost half of the 24 rounds in 2000 to take Alain Menu to his second title.

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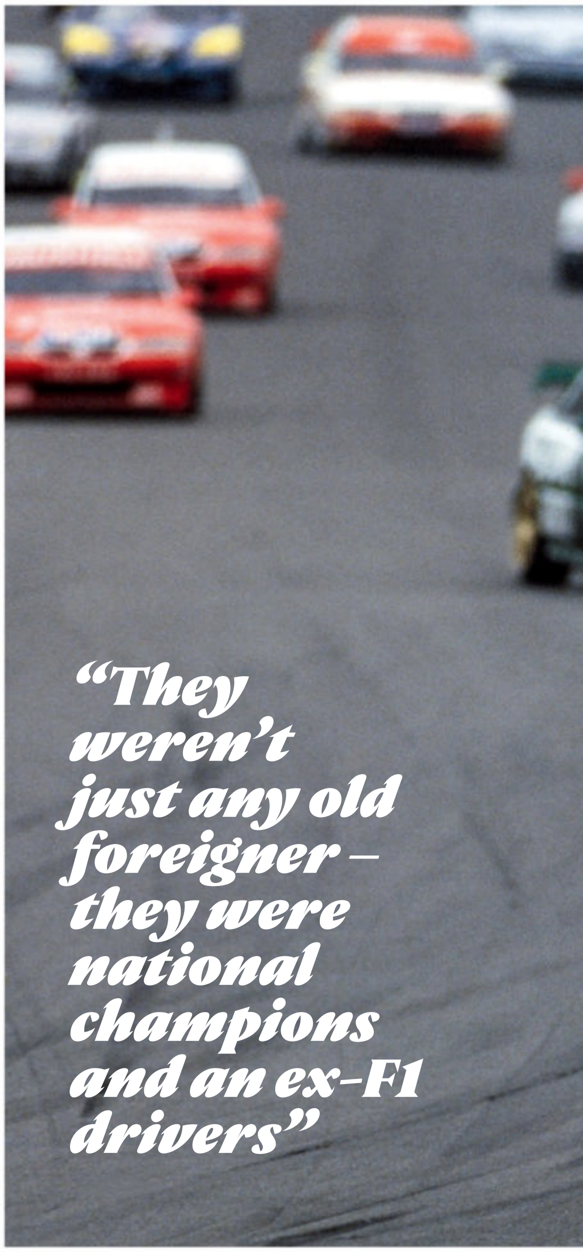
◂ first would battle for the title, which was the way it should be.”

In that inaugural season of 1991, there were four factory-supported teams. By 1994, in a mark of success of the regulations, the total had grown to 10: Alfa Romeo, BMW, Ford, Mazda, Nissan, Peugeot, Renault, Toyota, Vauxhall and Volvo.

The driver market was in boom time too. From a smattering of plucky privateer entries and a handful of properly funded established stars, the expanding grid boasted ex-Formula 1 drivers, huge budgets and the latest technology, tempting tens of thousands trackside to enjoy the entertainment. The bubble was being inflated as each season passed.

John Cleland flew the flag for the home-grown talents among the influx of overseas talent. He prevailed in 1995 in his Vauxhall Cavalier, defeating rivals from seven different countries as well as the British regulars.

“It was actually an honour to race against all these highly feted drivers from around the world,” the Scotsman recalls. “I had come up through the UK ranks, where it was all ‘jolly good stuff’ and ‘after you’ type racing. When Johnny Foreigner came in to drive in the BTCC, they weren’t just any old foreigner – they were the German champion, the Italian champion, the French champion or ex-Formula 1 drivers. I never felt like they were muscling in on my turf. It was such a change from the late 1980s,



“They weren’t just any old foreigner – they were national champions and an ex-F1 drivers”

# The standout moments

The result of Cleland’s infamous attempt at “going for first”

**SILVERSTONE, 1992**

## Flashpoint!

The championship came down to a three-way showdown in 1992, with BMW’s Tim Harvey, Vauxhall’s John Cleland and Toyota’s Will Hoy all in the mix going to the Silverstone finale. With Hoy down the order, Harvey stole a march in the points chase and was ‘assisted’ when the second 318is of Steve Soper cannoned into Cleland’s Cavalier and knocked the Scotsman out of the race. It was box-office stuff.

**OULTON PARK, 1994**

## Italians storm out

Alfa Romeo knew it had a trick up its sleeve with the 155 TS, and its homologation special caused a major rift in the BTCC – and moved the aerodynamics goalposts. It had special extended wings on the car but kept them under wraps until race one. Others protested, Alfa was told to take them off and the Italians responded by simply driving out of the gates of Oulton Park and not taking part in the race. They would be back to claim the crown, though.

**DONINGTON PARK, 1997**

## Plato sticks his nose in

The BTCC was an arena for established names. Then single-seater refugee Jason Plato came along and shook up the order. The 29-year-old Englishman was recruited by F1’s Frank Williams to drive a Renault Laguna and stormed to pole position for his first three races, before finishing his rookie season in third place. Plato still holds the record for the most BTCC race wins, at 97.

**DONINGTON PARK, 1999**

## David beats the Goliaths

There has been no bigger reward for winning a single BTCC round before or since. When Matt Neal crossed the line first in the longer feature race at Donington Park in the opening meeting of 1999, he scooped the £250,000 reward for becoming the first Independents’ Trophy entrant to win overall. It was a prize that had been offered since 1997 by organising body TOCA (which had luckily insured itself against such an outcome). Neal and his Nissan Primera GT didn’t win another race that season, but it didn’t matter.

**SILVERSTONE, 2000**

## Three into one won’t go

It seems somehow fitting that the final round of the BTCC’s Super Touring incarnation took place under cover of darkness at Silverstone. As the lights went out on the category in a night race, Alain Menu prevailed in a tight tussle with Ford Mondeo team-mates Rickard Rydell and Anthony Reid, despite a costly spin into retirement in the opening race of the weekend for the Swiss ace.

Alfa team reacted to protests against 155 in classic Italian style but I embraced it. It showed me – and the wider world too – that I could beat the best. So as far as I was concerned, the more the better."

It wasn't only a halcyon period for the drivers but for the teams too. With funding coming directly from manufacturers, they had access to bank accounts big enough to exploit any technical avenue they wanted.

The Williams Grand Prix Engineering team joined the line-up to run Renault's efforts and Tom Walkinshaw Racing, which owned the Arrows F1 team, ran the Volvos from 1994.

Ian Harrison, Williams' F1 team manager, switched his focus to the BTCC with the Laguna initially before going on to create the benchmark Triple Eight Race Engineering squad, which ran the Vauxhalls from 1997.

"There was almost too much you could do to the cars, and if you didn't quite have the budget, you were always playing second fiddle to the others," he recalls. "It was such an open book for engineering, which meant it was an interesting challenge for those who like that kind of thing. You could spend as much money as you wanted to drill down into the finest detail. It was nirvana for the engineers. But the model was hardly sustainable..."

For the drivers, the Super Touring era was a golden one in which many of them would write their names into the motorsport history books. Yet Cleland says that most were blissfully unaware of the impact the BTCC was creating.

**Wheel-to-wheel action often became paint-swapping action**

"I think we all took it for granted at the time: the media, the drivers, the teams – all of us maybe apart from the blokes writing the cheques back at the manufacturers," he says.

"We grew up in it, and it evolved from the early 1990s year by year, and it just got bigger. Then we realised it had got to the point where we couldn't nip to the gents' in the middle of race day without being mobbed by fans for autographs and it would take an hour. It was great for the ego, and even today I get recognised in England as 'that guy who used to do the touring cars'. That's a mark of the impact it made."

As Harrison alluded to, the seemingly endless reserves of cash did have to run dry at some point. While the fans may have regarded the mid-1990s as the high-water mark for the BTCC, the writing was already on the wall.

Gow recalls: "When the FIA adopted the regulations, [TOCA] lost control of those rules, and therefore it was political persuasions and machinations within the manufacturers which put the pressure on to take the rules in a certain direction. That's when things started to escalate, and I had teams and manufacturers complaining about the costs as early as 1996 – and these were the big players, not just the small ones."

One by one, the works teams withdrew – and it wasn't only from the UK but rather a worldwide movement away from the Super Touring rules. The costs had ramped up to such a degree that in 2000, the final year of those cars racing in the BTCC, some estimated that Prodrive's spend on a three-car team for the 24-race season was an eye-watering £10 million.

The BTCC reinvented itself with a new cut-price set of rules for 2001, and the series has gone on to thrive since those free-spending days of the 1990s. There hasn't been the same level of manufacturer interest since and drivers' wages have certainly gone down, but the main calling card of the series, which is thrilling on-track action, has never diminished. A

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# LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"It has been one easy, effortless journey after another"

**FINAL REPORT** **MILEAGE 2609**

# AUDI A3 SPORTBACK

## In a world of SUVs and electrification, did a diesel hatch still do it for us?

**WHY WE RAN IT** To see whether a facelift has succeeded in keeping this combustion-engined hatchback relevant

Go back a decade or two and an Audi A3 was the slightly posher mainstream choice for an everyday car. If you wanted to be a bit more fancy than a Ford Focus or even a Volkswagen Golf, this (or a BMW 1 Series) was it. Audi even claims to have established the premium compact segment by introducing the A3 in 1996.

Times have changed in the car buying world, but this hatchback is still more important for Audi that some people might expect. It accounts for a quarter of the firm's sales and is its best-selling model.

From the moment I stepped into the A3 at the end of last year, I could see why, and since then, it has been one easy, effortless journey after another.

What did I like particularly? Well, it's a handsome if safe-looking car but I don't think there's a spec or colour that suits it better than this one. The S Line detailing is sporty without being too try-hard and the white-on-black Audi logo and lack of chrome are fitting.

Inside, the user experience is a trusty, familiar one, even with fewer touchpoints than previously. The set-up is self-explanatory so you don't find yourself looking for basic functions and the layout and fonts on the touchscreen are intuitive and, to my eyes, agreeable. Maybe it's partly through the familiarity of Volkswagen Group products, but nonetheless it's coherent. And as Felix Page mentions (right), the tactile buttons are very welcome.

Apple CarPlay, which I'm rarely without, integrated easily each time and attaching my phone to charge via wire provided a fast charge for its fast-failing battery...

Sitting in the cabin, the accessibility of everything feels in reach and well proportioned, so there's enough space for your typical needs (unless there are four 6ft-plus occupants). I always found the seats to be comfortable and provide decent lumbar support and, given my lower back is increasingly twingey as I age, the A3 was one of the kinder cars I've driven of late for a lengthy journey.

I also enjoyed driving it. The first couple of journeys required some readjustment to the relative shortage of initial torque from a diesel compared with the electrically assisted motors I'd been driving, but I soon didn't give it a second thought.

This isn't a speedy car per se but 8.1sec for 0-62mph from its 148bhp 2.0-litre diesel is more than enough pace even on motorways.

The other obvious benefits of a diesel powertrain are the fuel economy and how rarely you have

**SECOND OPINION**

Not only does the A3 feel tangibly classier inside than its Volkswagen, Skoda and Cupra range-mates, but I think it's easier to use, with a balance of satisfyingly clunky buttons and a sensibly arranged touchscreen helping to minimise eyes-off time. Refreshingly traditional. **FP**

Wired Apple CarPlay worked flawlessly

Classy-looking yet inconspicuous A3 suited Burgess's taste

Seating provided good comfort and the miles slipped by at 50.8mpg

Touchscreen layout was easy to read and operate; Burgess liked the fonts too

RADIO
MEDIA
ONLINE MEDIA
TELEPHONE
NAVIGATION
Apple CarPlay
CAR
STORE

to fill up. When the range drops so slowly from above 500 miles, you feel spoilt by the convenience factor of not having to schedule fuel stops at annoying moments when you don't really have time. And then there's the fuel economy, which is decent, if not exceptional. During our time with the A3, it returned 50.8mpg but sometimes achieved very close to the claimed combined economy of 55.4mpg.

Being behind the wheel is undemanding. I know there are rivals with better steering feel but there's enough direction to make suburban manoeuvring trouble-free while also facilitating a little verve on rural, bendy roads, helped by the dimensions of a hatchback, which makes it a lovely thing to place on any road. Even in a world of SUVs, this hatchback feels big enough to hold its own without being preposterously oversized.

Then there's the way you're treated by other road users. It's fascinating as an automotive journalist to observe how peer drivers respond depending on which car you're in. It's subjective, of course, but I don't think Audis are the *most*-liked cars, or at least there was an era of that in the past 20 years or so, but this specific model appeared to be regarded by other drivers as inoffensive, which is welcome for someone who doesn't like to stand out.

Was there anything that grated? Happily, not much. The 380-litre boot space – pretty standard for a hatchback – seemed a bit lacking, perhaps because I've become used to the greater height of more SUV-like cars. In my current life, fitting my little boy's bike in easily is my measure of ease for a boot and this took some choreographing.

Other things: the diesel engine felt like it could have been more refined but I imagine that's the inevitable outcome of diesels no longer being honed as EV development is prioritised; I found the typically German executive black interior somewhat dull and claustrophobic; but the most annoying thing of all – in terms of what affected my ease of living most notably – was the absence of keyless entry, which is available only as part of a costly pack. Perhaps I'm being demanding, but in this day and age keyless entry feels a given.

Grumbles aside, this is a car that makes me feel as warm towards the premium hatchback segment as I always used to be. It's traditional in a comforting way without feeling out of date or irrelevant and has all the mod cons you want (and don't).

Diesel's death seems inevitable – though stranger things have happened – and such outcomes become self-fulfilling when upgrades aren't made. Its appeal remains for those who do many long journeys but, as the stats show, the natural choice – which would be mine – is the higher-powered petrol TFSI or the PHEV.

Next year, the A3 across all its generations will be 30 years old. I'm hopeful it has many more to come.
**RACHEL BURGESS**

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rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

**TEST DATA**

## AUDI A3 SPORTBACK 35 TDI S LINE S TRONIC

### MILEAGE

At start 450
At end 2609

### PRICES

**List price new** £36,265
**List price now** £37,160
**Price as tested** £38,355

### OPTIONS

Technology Pack £1495, District Green metallic paint £595

### ECONOMY AND RANGE

**Claimed economy** 55.4mpg
**Fuel tank** 50 litres
**Test average** 50.8mpg
**Test best** 54.8mpg
**Test worst** 47.3mpg
**Real-world range** 559 miles

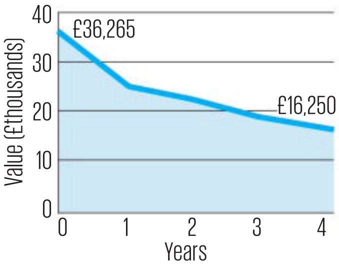
### TECH HIGHLIGHTS

**0-62mph** 8.1sec
**Top speed** 141mph
**Engine** 4 cyls, 1968cc, turbo, diesel
**Max power** 148bhp at 3000-4200rpm
**Max torque** 266lb ft at 1600-2750rpm
**Gearbox** 7-spd dual-clutch automatic
**Boot** 380 litres
**Wheels** 8.0Jx18in, alloy
**Tyres** 225/40 R18
**Kerb weight** 1485kg

### SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

**Contract hire rate** £420.88 pcm
**$CO_2$** 134g/km
**Service costs** None
**Other costs** None
**Fuel costs** £280.74
**Running costs including fuel** £280.74
**Cost per mile** 13 pence
**Faults** None

### DEPRECIATION



### PREVIOUS REPORTS

31 Dec 2024, 15 Jan 2025, 5 Feb, 12 Feb, 26 Feb, 12 Mar, 26 Mar

## LOVE IT

**MANUAL SEATS**
Adjusting the seats manually was effortless and just as quick as electronic alternatives.

**TACTILE BUTTONS**
Everything's so easy to work! You get the best of both worlds. If only all interiors were so intuitive.

**MUTE BUTTON**
Handily positioned on the steering wheel and easily my most used function in the car.

**SMART APPEARANCE**
Love the colour (District Green: a £595 option). Love the S Line logo. It's a handsome-looking car.

## LOATHE IT

**LACK OF KEYLESS ENTRY**
We're spoilt but having to use this feels atypical (and inconvenient) these days.

**FIRST REPORT**

# JEEP WRANGLER

## Cropley bags another brightly coloured off-roader. Yeehaw!

**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To discover whether the quintessential Jeep, which looks like fun, is really a vehicle you could live with day to day

The characteristics that make a car good are quite different to those that make it interesting. We've known this for years, but the theory is less prominent nowadays, because today's cars are decent to excellent on almost every front. However, the Jeep Wrangler, my car for the next few months, is a glorious exception. It takes you right back into an era of old-school variability, laughing at sober perfectionism, and makes your life all the better for that.

It has already been a couple of weeks since this Wrangler – a sensible-spec Sahara, rather than an even more aggressive and off-roady Rubicon – arrived in the car park. Since then, I've spent quite a few hours trying to identify why exactly I'm enjoying it so much.

The ride comfort is pretty poor. The cabin access isn't great. The rear load compartment is nothing special and exposed to the gaze of passers-by. At speed, the steering needs your best concentration or you will wander all over the place. There's lost motion at the straight-ahead. And with the solitary option of a £965 Firecracker Red paint job, it costs £62,090, so it's no bargain, even if it undercuts a similarly equipped (which is to say well-equipped) Land Rover Defender by at least £10,000. That's more of a comment on the Defender.

So far, so bad. But my theory after 1500 miles is that every single downside has an interesting upside attached. I don't care too much about the cabin access, because to my eye the styling is fabulous. If I could, I would have a Wrangler grille over the fireplace. The Tonka symmetry of the door shapes, the stance, the unimpeded ground clearance, the tiny overhangs and even that undershot jaw of a front bumper (which provides perfect outdoor seating) are all terrific.

Then there's the fact that this unique shape and style means the doors and sections of the roof can be removed. The windscreen folds flat, too. I relish the idea of driving around like that for a bit in the summer, catching insects in my teeth. We're going to do it, too, and it all feeds off the straight edges and exposed hinges of the Wrangler's styling. Even the rear compartment usefully contains a big, fat rollover bar that I'd rather have than the ritziest parcel shelf going.

The ride may be rough but it's also tough: you can feel the strength with every jolt. It rides flatly and never pitches. And sure, the steering is nothing special at 70mph, but the gearing and effort (plus wheel diameter and rim cross-section) are perfect for 15-25mph manoeuvring, which is what you do a helluva lot of both on road and off.

The little bit of green-laning I've so far done near home shows that even a non-Rubicon Wrangler is

Body control is as loose as the steering is vague. But it's easy to forgive all that

Our Wrangler's interior design smartly blends old-fashioned with modern

**"Every single downside has an interesting upside attached"**

**SECOND OPINION**

A recent green-laning expedition in the Lake District (Autocar, 2 April) illustrated to me just how capable the Wrangler is. I've found it's also surprisingly pliant around town, although I wonder if its road manners could grate on extended use. I will be interested to hear what Steve learns. **JA** perfect for the job.

A real surprise is how well the Wrangler does in town. Potholes are nothing to it. The elevated driving position and straight sides work in your favour. It doesn't even feel particularly wide, but that grille and the red paint helpfully encourage people to stay out of your way.

And then there's the engine. Having come from an ancient era when Jeeps had V8s and even before that a crude six, I didn't have high hopes for the 272bhp 2.0-litre turbo four, even when mated to a creamy seven-speed auto 'box. I imagined I would be talking lag and uneven torque delivery. Not a bit of it: this engine pulls strongly from nothing, cruises smoothly, can handle a tall gearing and can punt this two-tonne machine from 0-60mph in a mere 7.6sec. I can pass people easily on the open road using kickdown.

Its fuel consumption is a bugbear, but I had expected that. The usual is 24-26mpg in any use, and if you ever see 28mpg, you get the flags out. Even so, you can expect a touring range close to 500 miles, because the fuel tank is vast, at 99.5 litres.

So far, my mode of use has been town running and motorways; not much off-roading. Despite that, this is proving to be a handy car: easy to use and immensely tough. Better still, it's enjoyable. I love knowing it can't be hurt by kerbs or potholes; I revel in the engine performance.

The straight-backed driving position suits me too. The ultra-compact dashboard layout has switches. And the whole thing has that air of simple optimism that can still be found in American machinery, even if nothing much these days comes from one country.

Other Wrangler drivers wave at you (although the whole Wrangler community ignores lesser Jeep models). Defender owners seem not to think much of Wranglers – and they do, it must be admitted, drive a better vehicle. But in your Wrangler you're weirdly content, laughing, as I said earlier, at sober perfectionism. I've got months of this ahead – bring it on.

**STEVE CROPLEY**

**TEST DATA**

**JEEP WRANGLER 2.0 GME SAHARA**

**Price new** £61,125 **Price as tested** £62,090 **Options** Firecracker Red paint £965 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 25.4mpg (WLTP)

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steve.cropley@haymarket.com

Warmer weather means less time parked up at Tesla Superchargers

# TESLA MODEL 3

## Sentry mode off, Chill mode on, sun out: a range-winning combination

**MILEAGE** 38,943
**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To find out if an approved used car is the best route into Tesla ownership

One of the reasons I went for a Dual Motor Long Range version of the Model 3 was to avoid the range anxiety that's a feature of life with most EVs. A claim of 360 miles sounded like more than enough, particularly because I don't do many long journeys.

Of the 82kWh battery, only around 75kWh is usable, so that total sounded ambitious against the WLTP efficiency claim of 4.2mpkWh, yet I still found myself frustrated by my early economy.

On motorway runs, the car was getting about 3.7mpkWh, but that was dropping in town, resulting in a disappointing average of 3.4mpkWh for the first thousand miles or so, meaning a 255-mile range.

Decent but not as good as I had hoped for – not least because the Tesla consumes energy even when I'm not using it, which can take significant chunks from that total.

I was shocked during my first week with it to find that the total had dropped by 7% overnight. I went straight to the forums, where it was suggested that I might have had Sentry mode on (a remarkable security system that monitors the car via its multiple cameras and wards off would-be thieves) and, if so, apparently that loss was about right. So now I only use it if I think the car might be at risk.

The on-board diagnostics are great for researching losses. I've switched the powertrain from standard to Chill mode, which softens the throttle response and increases the severity of the regenerative braking (which has actually made it much nicer around town) and am trying to be stingier with the hugely effective climate control system.

Tesla claims average battery degradation of 12% after 200,000 miles, and out of interest I asked for a check on my car to see how its batteries were getting on. I wasn't given any specific numbers but was reassured that it was in line with expected degradation, so I'd guess there should still be 72-73kWh left.

Of course, after all of my stresses, the biggest change has been in the weather: as soon as spring came, things started to improve. That means I will be spending less time at Tesla Supercharger stations, which is both a blessing and a curse, because I've had to queue for some (my nearest, in Croydon, is particularly busy) but there's also a nice camaraderie among owners as we sit glued to our central screens while our totals gradually tick up.

**ALASTAIR CLEMENTS**

**LOVE IT**

**SEEING IN THE DARK**
The adaptive headlights are pretty fantastic for a four-year-old car, and there's fun to be had watching them work out where they can and can't shine.

**LOATHE IT**

**NEVER LET ME GO**
The charging port is very reluctant to release the cable. It doesn't respond to the phone app's command and it takes a few taps of the touchscreen icon.

**TEST DATA**

**TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE ALL-WHEEL DRIVE**

**Price new** £49,935 (in 2021) **Price as tested** £28,000 **Faults** None **Expense** None **Range** 255 miles **Economy** 3.4mpkWh **Last seen** 26.3.25

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# CUPRA TAVASCAN

## Over-eager safety tech isn't our only problem with this EV's braking

**MILEAGE** 2232
**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To find out if the Tavascan really is a sporty SUV – and if the segment needs it

It's late on a wet Tuesday evening and I've just driven to my local EV charging hub, an old 20kW unit, for some pre-commute juice. I've completed the ritual of topping up my account (it baffles me that all chargers aren't mandated to be plug-and-pay) and I jump out of the Tavascan into the rain.

"The brakes on that really aren't very good are they?" says a voice, which as I turn I find belongs to a man on rollerskates staring intently at me. Quite the fever dream. "I've just bought one," he continues before I have a chance to respond, "and I really don't think I'm ever going to get used to the brakes."

I have to agree with him. First because of the car park incident (see my 19 March report), when the car's sensors and emergency brakes had a public falling out, and second because the system is just a bit naff. In a nutshell, the transition from regenerative braking to disc braking is jarring, the pedal feel going from dull to sharp rather suddenly when you're stopping.

This is a problem that all of the Volkswagen Group's MEB-based EVs suffer from, but to me it feels more prominent here than in the VW ID 4 and ID 5, which is odd.

Thankfully, the Tavascan has a mitigating ace up its sleeve that its siblings don't: paddles behind the steering wheel that regulate the regen strength.

They're really useful when you're approaching a junction, and their strongest setting will even bring the car to a smooth stop. I really love this feature and use it continually.

This hasn't stopped me from playing about with the other drive settings, though, in an attempt to find a better no-paddle solution.

While the Eco and Comfort drive modes offer comparable levels of regen, Cupra mode introduces a sort of faux one-pedal driving function, though it's too extreme for my tastes. What's more, the immediate rate at which it deploys this dual-motor Tavascan's full 281bhp is just ludicrous for a large family SUV.

My 19 March report wasn't entirely positive but my appreciation of the Tavascan is returning. I've been plodding about the south coast in it, full of friends and kit, without further issues. Its real-world range of 223 miles is very usable, and it's a comfortable place in which to enjoy them.

**WILL RIMELL**

**LOVE IT**

**TOUCHSCREEN**
It's big, clear, pretty slick to use and aided by quick access tabs for useful but buried settings, such as the ADAS configurator.

**LOATHE IT**

**ODD DOOR HANDLES**
These touch-sensitive handles sometimes pull out and then snap back in, trapping skin.

Thankfully all 50kW-plus chargers like these do now offer contactless payment

**TEST DATA**

**CUPRA TAVASCAN 77KWH AFV 340 VZ1**
**Price new** £55,935 **Price as tested** £58,265 **Faults** Over-eager safety systems **Expenses** None **Range** 223 miles **Economy** 2.9mpkWh **Last seen** 2.4.25

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# INEOS GRENADIER

## Car absolutely not designed for road trips gets taken on a road trip

**MILEAGE** 12,240
**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To see if the spirit of the classic Land Rover Defender really does live on here

To north-east France and the Grenadier factory to see the opening of a biomass plant (saves money, greener than gas, smells like Christmas trees) and more importantly interview Lynn Calder, Ineos Automotive's CEO (hear us wherever you get your podcasts).

I could have taken several trains or flown, but Hambach is a way away from big cities. Colleagues reported taking more than two and a half hours to transfer across from Frankfurt airport. And where's the fun in any of that? It's only five hours from Calais, lending it ripe for a road trip, and I love road trips.

**LOVE IT**

**PAMPERED POSTERIOR**
The heated seat temperatures are perfectly judged (giving brief superheating or long-term cosiness) and there's one big button to spool through them.

**LOATHE IT**

**DIRTY WINDOWS**
In poor weather, aerodynamic swirls seem to deposit grime on the side windows, requiring a more regular tickle of glass and mirrors to retain rear visibility.

Grenadier didn't put a foot wrong during many motorway miles back to its birthplace

Via the Eurotunnel, Hambach is about 10 hours door to door from my gaff. Weekdays in mid-March are seemingly quiet for LeShuttle, so when I arrived early for my outbound train, they put me on an earlier one, and when I was late on the way back, they put me on the next one. If it's busy, this might not be so straightforward, but mostly it's a doddle. Coming home, I went from check-in to carriage in less than 20 minutes.

Long motorway journeys are not, you may understand, the Grenadier's forte, but I enjoy them. I find these broad seats really comfy, and while there was some consternation in early Grenadier commentary about footwell intrusion caused by the routing of the exhaust, the angled footrest has never bothered me.

Limiting my motorway speeds to the low 60s, I scored 21.3mpg to Hambach and back. I think you would have to wipe off another few MPH or slipstream some trucks to do much better. That's the nature of a 3.0-litre petrol six in a car like this.

Across bad cambers and big undulations, one is aware there's a lot of unsprung mass trying to unsettle the Grenadier's body, but it's generally absorbent.

Given its large size and bluff shape, I'm impressed with how little wind noise there is and how refined it feels. After a morning and a bit of factory tours and meetings and a schlep back, I arrived at home around midnight. Next morning, I wasn't unhappy to be back in the car for a commute.

**MATT PRIOR**

**TEST DATA**

**INEOS GRENADIER 3.0 T FIELDMASTER**
**Price new** £76,140 **Price as tested** £88,917 **Faults** None **Expenses** Tyre repair £25 **Economy** 21.3mpg **Last seen** 2.4.25

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# VW TIGUAN

## How much of a difference do the modes make? A fair bit, actually

Put it in Sport mode and it will corner more adeptly than you might expect

**MILEAGE** 8563
**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To find out if the new-gen Tiguan maintains the appeal of VW's best-seller

**S**o many mainstream cars these days offer a Sport driving mode, but usually it does little more than make an unpleasant-sounding engine rev harder and for longer, and as such I will try it once and then never touch it again. This Tiguan, though, has been enhanced with the Dynamic Driving Package (for £1025), meaning its modes affect not just the powertrain but also the dampers and steering.

Having defaulted to normal (Eco) mode, I decided to drive home the other day in Sport mode – or at least I planned to. I lasted only about 15 miles before the constant jiggling over rough surfaces and thumping over potholes became too much for me to bear. The latter is a problem with my particular Tiguan anyway, it being a sporty R-Line model on big, heavy, 20in wheels, but the experience needn't be so bad.

Indeed, when I switched over to Comfort mode, the difference was immediately noticeable: the jiggling faded away into serenity, the thumping reduced from frequent to occasional. The steering also felt considerably lighter, which seemed more appropriate for town but not there on the motorway.

Pleasingly, there's an Individual mode that, once selected via the twist-and-press dial on the transmission tunnel (which doubles as an audio volume dial), can then be configured on the touchscreen. And, impressively, there are not just three shades of damping but a full 15. After some experimentation, I settled on Comfort powertrain to keep the growling four-pot quiet, Comfort suspension to keep my vertebrae separated and Sport steering to take some of the effort out of keeping tracking straight.

**LOVE IT**

### RELATIVELY SUPPLE

It's not the comfiest but it rides a lot better than heavy electric SUVs. I was recently shocked by how unpleasant a Jaguar I-Pace felt from the back seat.

**LOATHE IT**

### IS THIS THING ON?

I really would quite like the rear-view camera to always show up, but it very rarely does. At least the sensors never fail.

Of course, there is an inherent oxymoron in testing Sport driving mode on a motorway, so I also took to a favourite countryside road, and here it makes a lot more sense: the firmer damping makes the car's body control much tighter and gives it that added bit of traction through corners, which really does boost your confidence. Although, of course, the problem of surface damage and thus discomfort is even worse on these less-valued roads.

While the Tiguan is neither the most comfortable nor the most dynamic family car on the road, it's a lot more talented than some SUV rivals. It takes a sensible middle point on the spectrum and earns further credit for allowing you to push it more one way or the other.

I only wish I were Christoph Cülmer of Bavaria, who could enjoy this Tiguan to its fullest potential.
**KRIS CULMER**

**TEST DATA**

**VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-LINE**
**Price new** £40,275 **Price as tested** £48,760 **Faults** Software glitches **Expenses** None **Economy** 39.5mpg **Last seen** 2.4.25

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# SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

## It's the ideal car for moving house – and quite a lot more besides

**MILEAGE** 3588
**WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT** To see whether this big new estate really is a flawless family hauler

**W**e don't give five-star road test verdicts often at Autocar. Indeed, 2024 qualified as an unusually fertile year with just three – for the Porsche 911 S/T, Hyundai Ioniq 5 N and Skoda Superb 2.0 TDI Estate. As the road tester who wrote the Superb verdict, I was looking forward to spending more time with the big Skoda. At the same time, there was a bit of uncertainty nagging at me: it's just a collection of Volkswagen MQB bits, so is it really that good?

**LOVE IT**

### STAR TURN

Skoda has a different steering wheel to other Volkswagen Group brands: round, two-spoked and with useful scroll wheels.

**LOATHE IT**

### RADAR ALWAYS ON

The adaptive cruise control is actually pretty good, but I wish it offered a standard cruise mode.

It's a vast 690 litres even before you retract the shelf or fold the seats

Happily, any doubt melted away as soon as I picked up this car. The Superb isn't exceptional because it brings you driving ecstasy on a special road. Instead it does the ordinary so well, and in a world where most modern cars make you adapt to their quirks and learn to live with poorly integrated systems, this one is just so instantly relaxing.

The seats and driving position are great. The response of the controls and the gearbox are just so. The whole user interface is clear and just works, the useful ADAS functions do what they're supposed to and the mandatory annoying ones are a cinch to turn off. Even on passive dampers it rides well, and not to the detriment of handling: the steering is great and the whole car rotates quite nicely into bends. If you behave, this diesel will even do 60mpg on a run. It's one of very few cars where my 'reviewer brain' can switch off and I just enjoy the drive.

My time with it has been perfectly timed with my house move. I let a removals firm do the heavy lifting, but the Superb came in very handy for runs back and forth to sign paperwork and to ferry smaller items from Kent to Oxfordshire. At an average of 53mpg, I could do several of those 230-mile round trips on the same 66-litre tank.

There's not much more to it than 'big, practical car is big and practical'. I'm not usually a fan of electric tailgates, because it's quicker to open one manually, but here I was thankful for hands-free operation when loading the boot with boxes. The only annoyance is that this car doesn't have a variable-height boot floor, so there's a step when you fold the rear seats.

That unticked option box aside, I'm rather enjoying life with the Superb. I'm starting to see more of them on the road, too. It seems people are cottoning on to how good it is. A five-star car? I'd still say so.
**ILLYA VERPRAET**

**TEST DATA**

**SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TDI SE L ESTATE**
**Price new** £39,705 **Price as tested** £41,675 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 53.5mpg **Last seen** 12.3.25

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HOW TO BUY A McLAREN F1

# WHEN McLAREN WROTE THE HYPERCAR RULEBOOK

## The F1 is perhaps the greatest road car of all time. Buy one if you can

What is the greatest road car of all time? There are many standouts that have had such an impact that they remain as aspirational in their old age as the day they left the factory. When it comes to engineering and design, one 1990s hero can hold its own with the best of any era: the McLaren F1.

With just 106 cars in existence (including race variants and prototypes), the chances of even seeing McLaren's seminal hypercar, never mind owning one, are slim. But if your Euromillions numbers come up, or a long-lost relative leaves you around, say, £15 million, then hopefully this guide will serve more as useful consumer advice than indulgent fantasy. Either way, it's a tasty prospect.

The F1 was designed by legendary duo Gordon Murray and Peter Stevens and launched in 1992. It was in effect the world's first hypercar, and two years later our road testers were given exclusive access to put it through its only full road test.

The figures we recorded on that day were the official stats used by McLaren themselves, and they told you all you needed to know about the F1's capabilities: 0-60mph in 3.2sec, 0-100mph in 6.3sec, 0-150mph in 12.8sec and a top speed in excess of 230mph. They were world-changing numbers back then, but even today the F1 outshines modern supercars.

Its phenomenal 627bhp atmospheric V12 was built by BMW at Murray's request. It manages to deliver uncompromising pace and a soundtrack reminiscent of a full-bore Le Mans racer while being

Central driving position is perfection, and there's room for two passengers

## What we said then

**11 MAY 1994**

"The McLaren F1 is the finest driving machine yet built for the public road. It possesses more performance than most of the cars racing at Le Mans this year, but that is almost a side issue compared with its real achievement: of containing such performance within a car that is without guile. It is a car that always inspires, never intimidates. We are also convinced that the F1 will be remembered as one of the great events in the history of the car. But £540,000? If we had the money, we'd form a queue."

pretty reliable, according to former racer Ray Bellm. He took delivery of chassis number 46 in 1994 and persuaded then McLaren CEO Ron Dennis to build him a track version, which would become the F1 GTR.

"I've owned five F1s – they were all very well built, and getting them serviced was never a problem," says Bellm. "My racing car only had one engine problem. The replacement was £80,000, which was a lot of money back then. It would cost you a million quid today."

Servicing and repair costs aren't for the faint of heart. A replacement clutch costs a five-figure sum, and the Kevlar fuel cell needs changing every five years. It's an engine-out job.

Finding an F1 for sale is another challenge: they never end up in the classifieds, and while Bellm noted that they do come up for auction every so often, most are sold in secret.

"Last year, several cars changed hands," reveals Bellm, who also founded the McLaren F1 Owners Club. "Most of the original owners are into their seventies now so quite a few are selling. I bought chassis 16R for £350,000 in 2004, so they were cheap at one point, but only when I started the owners club [in 2011] did they start to climb in value."

Thanks to its lightweight carbonfibre configuration, the F1 was an extraordinary car to drive, made even more immersive by its rule-breaking central driving position. Slide into the driver's seat and you're met with a near-perfect seating position with no pedal offset, a svelte steering wheel and a neat bank of switches either side of your thighs. But don't think for one moment that the F1 is like any other impractical hypercar: it can carry two passengers and fit a modest amount of luggage in the storage compartments behind the doors.

With prices for a road car starting at around £20m and race cars closer to £30m, F1s rarely see the light of day. But if you ever get your hands on one of the best production cars of all time, take Bellm's advice: "Use it like a normal car. What is the point of owning one if you're going to keep it in a museum?"

**SAM PHILLIPS**

The F1's performance is incredible, but it is benign and accessible to drive

**"F1s are never in the classifieds. They come up for auction every so often, but most are sold in secret"**

# How to get one in your garage

## AN OWNER'S VIEW

**RAY BELLM, FORMER OWNER AND F1 GTR RACING DRIVER**

"I ordered chassis number 46 after attending the launch event in Monaco in 1992 and planned to convert it into a racing car. Ron Dennis said I couldn't and offered to build me a one-off racer for £1 million, but I didn't have the money. He told me to go and find three other customers who wanted a racing car, and he'd charge us £650,000 plus VAT. I found two other buyers and took delivery of the car at the same time as my road car, so I had two McLaren F1s."

## BUYER BEWARE…

**■ GEARBOX**

The six-speed manual 'box is a robust transmission that can easily handle the 627bhp V12, but run it up through the gears and make sure shifts are smooth.

**■ CLUTCH**

The carbonfibre item isn't unreliable, but it doesn't like to be slipped. Replacement is a labour-intensive job that will cost around a five-figure sum.

**■ BRAKES**

Standard-fit pads and discs are good. Pads should be replaced every 15,000 miles. MSO Heritage has refined the pad material over the years to improve pedal feel.

**■ INTERIOR**

Check the bolster on the left-hand side of the driver's seat for wear – it is likely to have been caught by an owner climbing in (see 'Also worth knowing').

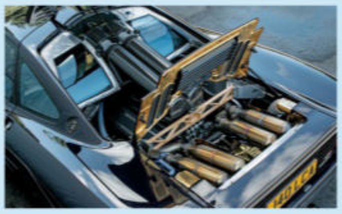
**■ BODY**

Check for any scuffs to the bodywork: repairs to the carbonfibre body or tub will cost an eye-watering amount.

Gold foil was added to the engine bay and bonnet to act as a heat shield, reflecting heat away from the fuel tank and protecting the body from the heat created by the engine and exhaust. It is often replaced when the engine is out for a service and takes up to 18 hours to complete.

**■ SERVICING**

A routine service can take in the region of 85 hours and is painstakingly thorough: the engine is removed and the fuel tank, fuel hoses and other components are replaced. The engine, gearbox and ancillaries are then all surgically cleaned,



and the suspension is retuned. The car then goes to Millbrook Proving Ground for a sign-off test.

McLaren will also replace the dampers every 10 years as part of a service.

## ALSO WORTH KNOWING

How do you get in? Enter from the left-hand side, sit on the corner of the passenger seat, put one leg in the driver footwell, support your body by placing an arm behind your back, place your other leg in the footwell, grab the seat's side bolster, lift yourself across and slide in. Simple.

If you do buy an F1, make sure it comes with the factory tool chest and the leather case that contains the service book.

The F1's fuel cells need to be replaced every five years, but British engineering firm Lanzante can supply and fit an aluminium cell that will last for the rest of the car's life. Winner.

## HOW MUCH TO SPEND

**£1000-£17,000**

Scale models of up to 1:8 in size with zero miles on the clock and in brand-new condition. Amalgam's 1:8-scale model is a work of art.

**£15,000,000-£24,999,999**

You'll need at least £15 million on the table to enter into negotiations to buy any F1 road car. Mileage, age and condition vary considerably.

**£25,000,000-£35,000,000**

Low-mileage examples in as-new condition. Ultra-rare F1 GTR racing cars available here.

## ONE WE FOUND

At present there are no F1s for sale. Chassis number 29 was sold at auction in May last year for an undisclosed fee. Its previous owner bought it in 2021 for $20,465,000 (£14,825,000). It had covered just 254 miles from new.

My car & I

# Oh whoops, I bought a V12-engined Ferrari

Finished in unblemished Blue Le Mans and with an unmarked Connolly hide interior, the Ferrari 456 GTA of Mark Lee looks as fresh as the day it left its Maranello birthplace in 1997, destined for its first owner in Hong Kong. And so it should, with just 23,000 miles on the clock and, since its arrival in the UK in 2003, the regular attentions of Ferrari dealers. That programme of TLC culminated last year in a thorough overhaul by Meridien Modena, prior to the car being auctioned at the Classic Motor Show in November.

Mark was there at the auction with a few quid in his pocket. "It got to mid-afternoon and then this 456 GTA came through," he tells me. "There had been some high prices for fast Fords, but the hall was now a bit flat. I'd not looked at the Ferrari previously and it was struggling to attract any interest. I think the guide was suggesting £45,000 to £50,000, which seemed a bit high.

"Eventually, bids for the car got to £25,000 and there was now just one telephone bidder. The auctioneer was getting frustrated. He raised the hammer for the first time inviting any late bids. No one responded. He tried for a second time but still without success. The third time I stuck my card up and

*Our cars*

## Baja Bug is more 'to-do' than done

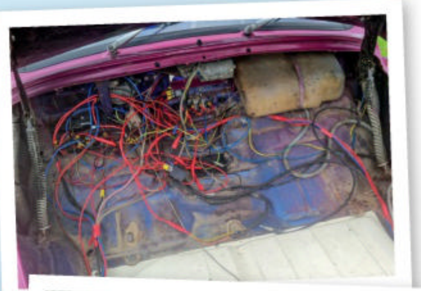
**BY MATT PRIOR**

The list of things I have to do to my Baja Bug is so lengthy that I don't quite know where to start. I recently stripped and rebuilt the engine, but do I keep trying to tune the carburettors properly, or should I do away with them and fit fuel injection?

Every time I open the bonnet and see the mass of cables that look like the world's worst office IT cabinet (not my doing, honest), I close it again and try to forget about it, because I won't enjoy sorting those. Then when I look at the pastel blue paint – it was pink, so this is my doing – I wonder if I really love it or would prefer a different colour. I did enjoy repainting it the first time, so maybe that will keep me amused. I'd like something period, very '70s, but less Liquorice Allsort-blue.

The ride is awful, too, so the suspension wants work. And it's noisy, so while I like the stripped-out interior, perhaps I should finally put carpets in. Then the one thing I should really, really do, is drive it to the coast with the Beach Boys playing. As soon as I fit a stereo…

DIY spray job was actually good fun, but the colour might need to change



Wire we waiting? Nightmare electrics are by a previous owner

Paintwork is blemish-free – under the road grime of a UK winter

The 456 is immaculate inside, too, with barely any wear and tear

## "Mark bagged a 190mph Ferrari for the price of a modest new hatchback"

the room erupted. The auctioneer's colleague was shouting: 'We've got another bidder in the room!'

"The phone bidder now had competition. The car had been going up in £3000 increments and was now at £28,000. I had to bid, but before I did the auctioneer said it would be a shame to lose the car so he'd ask only for another £1000. At that moment, the other bidder hung up, leaving me the only and highest bidder at £28,000. I was thinking it was about £15,000 off the reserve, and then the hammer went down!

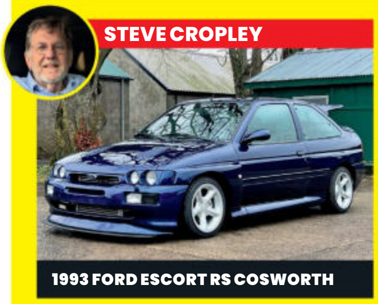
"People couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. I'd become the owner of a car I'd only seen in photographs. With fees, this stunning Ferrari 456 GTA with just 23,000 miles had cost me only £32,000. Perhaps it being an automatic was the reason there was little interest, but I was one happy new owner!"

Whatever the reason, Mark had bagged a 190mph Ferrari 456 GTA, once one of the most expensive models in the manufacturer's range but now his for the price, today, of a modest new hatchback – and now he had to tell his wife. He says: "'We have to pick a car up next Saturday,' I told her. 'Why?' she asked. 'Because I've bought it,' I said. 'Oh no – which of your other cars are you selling?' she replied. I told her she didn't understand the concept of a car collection and that I couldn't possibly sell my Toyota GR Yaris or Mk1 MR2. All three meet my criteria: one a rally homologation special, another a classic mid-engined sports car and the third a classic V12 GT."

The 456 costs Mark £570 to insure through the Ferrari Owners' Club on a limited-mileage policy that even allows track-day use when organised by the club. "I think that's a reasonable price to pay for such a special car," says Mark. "I do wonder what I might replace it with one day, of course, but whatever it is, it will cost an awful lot more!"

**JOHN EVANS**

## Head to head


STEVE CROPLEY

1993 FORD ESCORT RS COSWORTH

VS

MATT PRIOR

1992 ALFA ROMEO SZ

**Brief: Find a super-cool '90s icon for no more than £60,000**

**MP** It's a pretty generous budget. I've found a 1992 Alfa SZ for €59,000, just serviced, one owner, 48,000km and in red, obviously.

**SC** You had a go in one, didn't you?

**MP** Yes. I thought about buying one when they were £15,000 but never even drove one, so a reader invited me to drive his. It was great. Great visibility, comfortable ride, terrific engine, balanced handling.

**SC** It is. When you came up with that, I thought 'he's trumped me'. I had a look at a low-mileage Viper, then I found a flashy £59k Ford, a left-handed Escort RS Cosworth 'big turbo' homologation special, imported from Italy but with only 70k miles on it. It's had a fair helping of mods but looks absolutely mint. It's nowhere near as high-born as your Alfa, but it'd have Ford robustness to spare.

**MP** So who wins this argument?

**SC** You win on originality and sophistication, because in the end the Cossie is just a hot-rodded Ford Escort. But I might win on the fact I'd feel okay blasting it on weekends, with decent prospects of mending whatever went wrong.

**MP** Do we call it a tie?

**SC** Nope. You get the win. It's narrow but decisive.

## CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

**JORDAN-FORD 191**
**1991, price on application**
Rather than spend £20m on a McLaren F1 (p84), why not buy an actual F1 car? This 1991 Jordan was driven by Michael Schumacher on his F1 debut at Spa. The last F1 Jordan to be auctioned sold for more than £1.5m, so that's your price guide.

**AUDI RS2 AVANT**
**1995, 158,000 miles, £47,995**
Easily a '90s standout, the RS2 is a super-cool performance wagon that can keep up with most modern estates. This RHD example has done big miles, but the recently serviced turbocharged five-pot is said to be in good order. We'd buy it just for the Nogaro Blue paint.

**MGF 1.8i VVC**
**1998, 12,500 miles, £8995**
Those in the market for an Elise S1 or MX-5 might wish to consider MG's mid-engined drop-top, too. This 1998 F caught our eye thanks to its low miles, two ex-keepers and red leather seats. It even has the more potent 143bhp K-series engine.

**RANGE ROVER 3.9 VOGUE SE**
**1995, 136,000 miles, £24,995**
This immaculate V8-powered Range Rover was treated to a major restoration a few years ago, with a full mechanical overhaul. There are 22 stamps in its service book and a huge file of invoices.

# Lost in the archive

## The best...

### 1990 HONDA NSX

"What makes the NSX special is that it rewrites the supercar rules. It proves that a 160mph, mid-engined two-seater need not be uncomfortable, heavy and impossible to see out of. Quite the reverse, it packages the ability of a Lotus or Ferrari in a form as friendly and, most importantly, as safe as a Civic."

### 1991 VOLKSWAGEN GOLF VR6

"The first of a new breed of car. It is a front-drive hatch that is nevertheless more fun to drive than the finest rear-drive sports saloon. It's faster too, thanks to a 15deg V6 engine every bit as characterful as BMW's sublime straight six. These are qualities that are hard to forget."

### 1992 NISSAN MICRA

"Setting new standards for build quality, refinement, interior design and safety awareness, the Micra, so cute and cuddly to look at, opens up a new level of sophistication that makes existing class contenders look old indeed."

### 1993 FORD MONDEO

"In its class, there is simply no other front-driver that handles as well, rides as comfortably or steers with such delicate accuracy. An excellent driving position is complemented by clearly conceived ergonomics and excellent build quality."

### 1994 VOLKSWAGEN POLO

"It seems hard to imagine how, until someone designs a car with the same originality and clarity of thought that went into the [classic] Mini, the art of the small hatchback can be materially advanced beyond the position currently occupied by the Polo."

### 1995 PEUGEOT 406

"The 406 is comfortable and spacious, elegant and well equipped. Most impressive is a quality of ride and refinement that would have had Jaguar baffled not many years ago. It combines this with a cornering confidence that its predecessor would not even recognise."

### 1996 FORD KA

"There's great pleasure to be had in driving a car with minimal power but an excellent chassis. The Ka has no bad habits and can be driven at the limit of its performance for endless miles."

### 1997 NISSAN SKYLINE GT-R

"This is one of the greatest performance cars of all time. A strong statement, but not one that is too hard to justify. It is a rare combination of technology and excitement. It's almost guaranteed that you will step out of the GT-R after a fast drive amazed at the thing's ability."

### 1998 FORD FOCUS

"The Focus is the car that redefined the class standard, providing the family driver with a combination of sporting agility, luxury car refinement and mechanical integrity that is unique. Unbeatable right now."

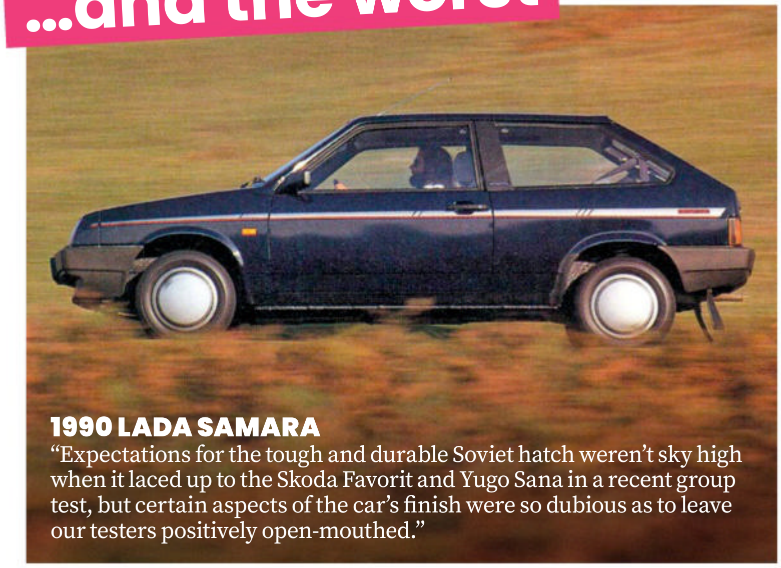
### 1999 TOYOTA YARIS

"Few small cars feel better the faster they go, but the Yaris is an exception. On A-roads, it displays a level of body control and fun more akin to a junior GTi. Refreshingly different and characterful, it's the best supermini on sale. Truly groundbreaking."

Time distorts perspectives, so they say. So let's see which 1990s cars we adored and scorned when they were new

'90s Special

# ...and the worst



### 1990 LADA SAMARA

"Expectations for the tough and durable Soviet hatch weren't sky high when it laced up to the Skoda Favorit and Yugo Sana in a recent group test, but certain aspects of the car's finish were so dubious as to leave our testers positively open-mouthed."

### 1991 MAHINDRA INDIAN CHIEF

"It leaves you amazed: who on earth would want to buy one? On the road, it's a nightmare. The steering owes more to the manner of a barge than a motor vehicle, and if you can get more than a couple of millimetres of travel from the suspension, you need to lose some weight."

### 1992 HINDUSTAN AMBASSADOR

"A 1954 Morris Oxford made in India, shipped to fashionable SW6 and sold for £5895 is some sort of twisted joke. Until you drive it and don't smile. The [Isuzu] engine is run-of-the-mill and out of character, it doesn't handle, it doesn't stop and its seats will do your back in."

### 1993 RENAULT SAFRANE

"This is a disappointing car, period. But the V6 version, theoretically the most desirable of the lot, epitomises all that is wrong with Renault's UK flagship. It's overweight and underwhelming in a sense that big, pointless Japanese cars used to be before Toyota turned the rest of the world a paler shade by producing the Lexus [LS]."

### 1994 FORD FIESTA 1.6 Si

"The ageing [Mk3] Fiesta is now no more than an also-ran. So to the rescue comes the 1.6 Si. Its aim is to be an insurance-friendly hot hatch, but it only manages this through lamentable performance and near-zero driving appeal."

### 1995 KIA PRIDE 1.3i

"For all the Kia's undoubted worthiness, it is dynamically, stylistically and ergonomically nowhere in the face of its competition. Its faults are as numerous as they are self-evident."

### 1996 VAUXHALL ASTRA 1.6i SPORT

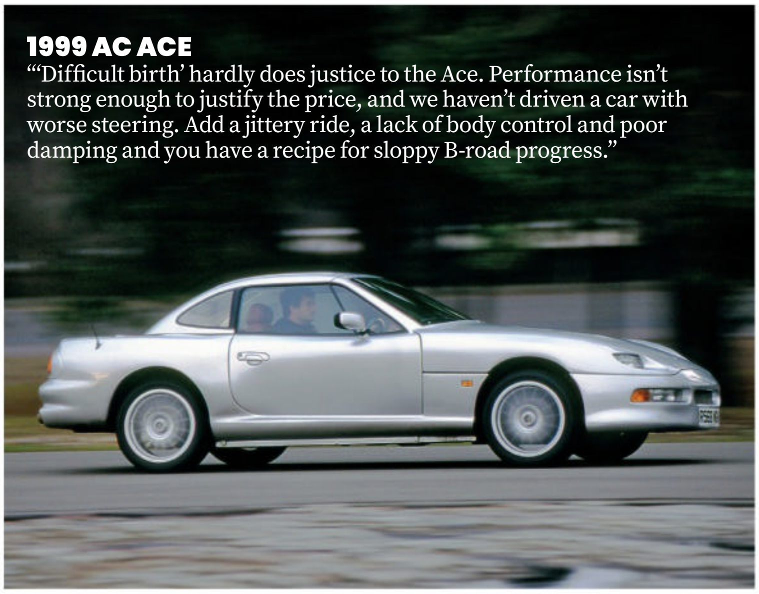
"There are only two good reasons for buying an Astra: its engine and its build quality. The rest, as they say, is history, or at least it should be. Another example of Vauxhall being wide of the mark."

### 1997 DAEWOO NUBIRA ESTATE

"Compared with some rivals, it feels terribly dated already. We'd have complained about its poor body control five years ago. There is still a large gulf to be filled before Daewoo catches up."

### 1998 CADILLAC SEVILLE STS

"Laden with equipment the roomy interior may be, but it fails comprehensively to stand comparison with the best European cars. Nor are the handling, steering, ride and gearbox refinement anything like up to scratch."



### 1999 AC ACE

"'Difficult birth' hardly does justice to the Ace. Performance isn't strong enough to justify the price, and we haven't driven a car with worse steering. Add a jittery ride, a lack of body control and poor damping and you have a recipe for sloppy B-road progress."

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# ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of the independent, objective and empirical road testing of new cars is the longest in the world. But like everything that endures, our road testing process has always moved with the times.

Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car - and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into their findings and learn more about more than a century of road tests with a subscription to the ever-expanding digital Autocar Archive (visit themagazineshop.com/aca23ed/aca).

**Matt Saunders, road test editor**

## ABARTH

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **500 Esseesse** ★★★★☆ 25.3.09<br>Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun. | 7.6 | 6.5 | 1135 | 35.8 | - |
| **500e Turismo** ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23<br>A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining. | 6.9 | 6.4 | 1395 | - | 142 |
| **595 Competizione** ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14<br>Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad. | 7.5 | 6.4 | 1135 | 39.2 | - |

## ALFA ROMEO

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Giulia Quadrifoglio** ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17<br>Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph. | 4.5 | 3.2 | 1700 | 35.7 | - |
| **Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione** ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18<br>Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements. | 6.8 | 7.0 | 1815 | 49.7 | - |
| **Stelvio Quadrifoglio** ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19<br>A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability. | 4.0 | 3.3 | 1931 | 31.9 | - |
| **Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD** ★★★★☆ 28.6.23<br>Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well. | 5.7 | 5.3 | 1784 | 32.2 | - |

## ALPINE

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A110 Première Edition** ★★★★★ 16.5.18<br>Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion. | 4.7 | 3.8 | 1125 | 45.6 | - |
| **A110 Légende GT** ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22<br>The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version. | 4.8 | 3.9 | 1140 | 40.2 | - |
| **A110 R** ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23<br>Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price. | 4.2 | 3.5 | 1094 | 39.7 | - |

## ARIEL

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Atom 4** ★★★★★ 9.10.19<br>Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character. | 3.2 | 2.4 | 680 | 39.2 | - |

## ASTON MARTIN

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Vantage** ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24<br>Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability. | 3.5 | 2.6 | 1745 | 28.5 | - |
| **DBS Superleggera** ★★★★★ 21.11.18<br>Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever. | 3.7 | 2.7 | 1910 | 25.6 | - |
| **Vanquish** ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25<br>Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT. | 3.1 | 2.3 | 1951 | 25.8 | - |
| **DBX 707** ★★★★☆ 30.11.22<br>A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement. | 3.3 | 2.8 | 2278 | 26.2 | - |

## AUDI

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition** ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19<br>Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price. | 7.9 | 8.4 | 1209 | 57.0 | - |
| **S3 Sportback** ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20<br>Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch. | 4.8 | 4.2 | 1552 | 39.0 | - |
| **RS4 Avant** ★★★★☆ 14.2.18<br>A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma. | 4.0 | 3.5 | 1790 | 36.7 | - |
| **S5 Launch Edition** ★★★★☆ 15.1.25<br>Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal. | 4.1 | 3.8 | 2027 | 33.7 | - |
| **A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic** ★★★⯪☆ 8.3.17<br>Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style. | 5.7 | 5.3 | 1535 | 41.1 | - |
| **A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line** ★★★★☆ 5.1.22<br>Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials. | 5.7 | 5.2 | 2077 | 45.4 | 34 |
| **RS6 Avant GT** ★★★★☆ 5.2.25<br>Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate. | 3.2 | 2.7 | 2144 | 26.3 | - |
| **A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport** ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18<br>Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics. | 5.8 | 5.3 | 1880 | 53.1 | - |
| **A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport** ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20<br>Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be. | - | - | 2330 | - | - |
| **E-tron 55 Quattro** ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19<br>A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche. | 5.4 | 4.2 | 2569 | - | 218 |
| **E-tron S Quattro** ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21<br>A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs. | 4.2 | 3.6 | 2643 | - | - |
| **Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport** ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16<br>Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been. | 8.1 | 8.2 | 1316 | - | - |
| **SQ2 Quattro S Tronic** ★★★★☆ 20.3.19<br>More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model. | 4.5 | 4.1 | 1530 | 34.5 | - |
| **Q4 E-tron 40 Sport** ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21<br>Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product. | 8.1 | 7.8 | 2112 | - | - |
| **Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic** ★★★★☆ 15.3.17<br>Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish. | 8.3 | 8.5 | 1770 | 42.5 | - |
| **SQ5 TSI Quattro** ★★★⯪☆ 21.6.17<br>Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew. | 5.5 | 5.0 | 1870 | 32.6 | - |
| **SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro** ★★★⯪☆ 3.8.22<br>Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see. | 5.1 | 4.6 | 2023 | 49.0 | - |
| **Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1** ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24<br>EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials. | 5.3 | 4.3 | – | 2.8 | 247 |
| **Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line** ★★★★☆ 12.8.15<br>Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though. | 6.2 | 6.2 | 2245 | - | - |
| **SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro** ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16<br>A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance. | 5.1 | 4.5 | 2330 | 37.9 | - |
| **Q8 50 TDI S Line** ★★★★☆ 26.9.18<br>Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more. | 6.9 | 6.7 | 2285 | 40.1 | - |
| **R8 V10 Plus** ★★★★☆ 30.12.15<br>Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy. | 3.1 | 2.6 | 1730 | - | - |
| **S E-tron GT** ★★★★☆ 2.4.25<br>Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge. | 3.1 | 2.4 | 2361 | 2.8 | 262 |

## BENTLEY

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bentayga W12** ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16<br>Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge. | 4.9 | 4.4 | 2440 | - | - |
| **Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline** ★★★★☆ 24.4.24<br>Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far. | 4.4 | 3.8 | 2600 | 25.6 | - |
| **Continental GT W12 First Edition** ★★★★⯪ 2.5.18<br>Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class. | 3.6 | 2.9 | 2295 | 26.4 | - |
| **Continental GT Speed** ★★★★☆ 22.12.21<br>Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer. | 3.4 | 2.7 | 2279 | 22.0 | - |
| **Continental GTC V8 S** ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23<br>Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good. | 3.6 | 3.2 | 2295 | 29.1 | - |
| **Flying Spur W12** ★★★★⯪ 15.7.20<br>Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters. | 3.9 | 3.2 | 2500 | 32.5 | - |
| **Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner** ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22<br>Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings. | 4.4 | 3.9 | 2596 | 30.1 | 28 |

## BMW

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **120 M Sport** ★★★⯪☆ 31.12.24<br>Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal. | 7.3 | 6.8 | 1489 | 45.8 | - |

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **218i M Sport Gran Coupé** | ★★★☆☆ | 8.4.20 | Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire. | 8.8 | 8.4 | 1375 | 58.2 | - |
| **220i M Sport Coupé** | ★★★★☆ | 1.6.22 | A good coupé rather than a great sports car. | 7.3 | 7.3 | 1546 | 46.8 | - |
| **M2 Coupé Manual** | ★★★★⯪ | 12.7.23 | Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones. | 4.5 | 3.8 | 1687 | 32.1 | - |
| **320d M Sport Auto** | ★★★★★ | 15.5.19 | BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights. | 6.9 | 6.8 | 1639 | 63.3 | - |
| **330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring** | ★★★★⯪ | 15.1.20 | An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match. | 5.5 | 5.2 | 1922 | 52.6 | - |
| **330e M Sport** | ★★★★⯪ | 1.7.20 | Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series. | - | - | 1740 | - | - |
| **M440i xDrive** | ★★★★☆ | 6.1.21 | A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks. | 4.1 | 3.7 | 1775 | 44.0 | - |
| **M4 Competition** | ★★★★⯪ | 21.4.21 | A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one. | 3.9 | 2.9 | 1800 | 32.7 | - |
| **i4 M50** | ★★★★☆ | 19.1.22 | Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics. | 4.1 | 3.2 | 2248 | - | 186 |
| **M4 CSL** | ★★★★☆ | 16.11.22 | A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match. | 3.6 | 2.7 | 1625 | 31.1 | - |
| **M5** | ★★★⯪☆ | 29.1.25 | A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration. | 3.5 | 2.8 | 2373 | 27.3 | 35 |
| **i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro** | ★★★⯪☆ | 29.11.23 | Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons. | 5.4 | 4.4 | 2213 | - | 235 |
| **550e xDrive M Sport Pro** | ★★★★☆ | 3.4.24 | Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon. | 4.4 | 3.5 | 2232 | 40.1 | 47 |
| **i7 xDrive60 M Sport** | ★★★★⯪ | 15.2.23 | It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW. | 4.5 | 3.4 | 2758 | - | 264 |
| **840d xDrive** | ★★★★☆ | 16.1.19 | A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale. | 5.0 | 4.6 | 1901 | 49.2 | - |
| **M8 Competition Convertible** | ★★★⯪☆ | 5.2.20 | Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT. | 3.3 | 2.7 | 2020 | 31.6 | - |
| **M8 Competition** | ★★★⯪☆ | 3.6.20 | Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT. | - | - | 1960 | - | - |
| **X1 xDrive23i M Sport** | ★★★⯪☆ | 25.1.23 | A decent family crossover but a poor BMW. | 6.4 | 6.0 | 1800 | 45.6 | - |
| **X4 M Competition** | ★★★☆☆ | 13.11.19 | Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect. | 4.0 | 3.3 | 2028 | 29.0 | - |
| **X5 xDrive30d M Sport** | ★★★★☆ | 2.1.19 | Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board. | 6.6 | 6.6 | 2279 | 43.1 | - |
| **X6 M Competition** | ★★★☆☆ | 20.3.24 | Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV. | 3.5 | 3.1 | 2442 | 29.3 | - |
| **X7 M50i M Performance xDrive** | ★★★★☆ | 9.9.20 | Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many. | 4.8 | 3.9 | 2583 | 30.5 | - |
| **X7 M60i xDrive** | ★★★★☆ | 29.3.23 | Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined. | 4.2 | 3.7 | 2600 | 28.9 | - |
| **iX xDrive50 M Sport** | ★★★★⯪ | 2.3.22 | Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise. | 4.4 | 3.4 | 2593 | - | 252 |
| **Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack** | ★★★★☆ | 21.8.24 | Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth. | 5.7 | 5.9 | 1561 | 36.9 | - |

### BMW ALPINA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B3 GT Touring** | ★★★★⯪ | 15.1.25 | Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats. | 3.3 | 2.7 | 1910 | 29.4 | - |
| **B8 Gran Coupé** | ★★★★☆ | 22.9.21 | Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks. | 3.5 | 2.8 | 2100 | - | - |

### BYD

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Atto 3 Design** | ★★★☆☆ | 31.5.23 | Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech. | 7.0 | 6.2 | 1787 | - | 201 |
| **Seal Design** | ★★★⯪☆ | 17.1.24 | Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware. | 5.8 | 4.7 | 2116 | - | 279 |

### CATERHAM

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Seven 160** | ★★★★☆ | 20.11.13 | Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise. | 8.4 | 8.7 | 510 | 44.8 | - |
| **Seven 620S** | ★★★★⯪ | 9.3.16 | Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability. | 3.8 | 4.2 | 650 | 29.5 | - |
| **Seven 420 Cup** | ★★★★⯪ | 31.8.22 | Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price. | 4.2 | 3.4 | 560 | 35.3 | - |

### CHEVROLET

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corvette 3LT** | ★★★★☆ | 22.6.22 | Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon. | 3.9 | 3.2 | 1679 | 32.9 | - |
| **Corvette Z06 3LZ** | ★★★★☆ | 16.8.23 | Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right. | 3.1 | 2.4 | 1670 | 26.1 | - |

### CITROEN

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ami Colour** | ★★⯪☆☆ | 11.1.23 | Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities. | - | - | 471 | - | 39 |
| **C3 Puretech 110 Flair** | ★★★⯪☆ | 28.12.16 | Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting. | 9.6 | 9.4 | 1050 | 62.3 | - |
| **C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair** | ★★★⯪☆ | 7.3.18 | Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless. | 11.5 | 10.7 | 1159 | 39.5 | - |
| **C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto** | ★★★☆☆ | 26.5.21 | Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution. | 9.5 | 9.2 | 1320 | 56.4 | - |
| **ë-C4 X Shine** | ★★★⯪☆ | 3.5.23 | EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified. | 9.7 | 8.8 | 1623 | - | 162 |
| **C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus** | ★★★⯪☆ | 13.2.19 | Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance. | 9.0 | 8.5 | 1540 | 47.8 | - |
| **C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus** | ★★★★☆ | 28.9.22 | Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making. | 7.8 | 7.1 | 1502 | 47.8 | - |

### CUPRA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Born 204PS 58kWh V3** | ★★★⯪☆ | 6.7.22 | As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be. | 6.7 | 6.2 | 1794 | - | 220 |
| **Born VZ First Edition** | ★★★★☆ | 9.10.24 | An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed. | 5.4 | 4.2 | 1996 | 3.5 | 269 |
| **Leon Estate 310PS VZ3** | ★★★★☆ | 8.9.21 | Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly. | 4.9 | 4.3 | 1707 | 40.1 | - |
| **Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2** | ★★★★☆ | 27.7.22 | Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec. | 5.9 | 4.7 | 1468 | 43.4 | - |
| **Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG** | ★★★⯪☆ | 23.1.19 | Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward. | 4.9 | 4.4 | 1615 | 36.7 | - |
| **Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG** | ★★★★⯪ | 3.2.21 | Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet. | 5.1 | 4.3 | 1583 | 36.4 | - |
| **Tavascan V1** | ★★★☆☆ | 5.2.25 | Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable. | 6.0 | 5.0 | 2129 | 3.2 | 246 |

### DACIA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige** | ★★★★☆ | 28.4.21 | Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas. | 11.9 | 11.9 | 1096 | 54.1 | - |
| **Duster Hybrid 140 Journey** | ★★★★⯪ | 27.11.24 | Notably improved yet barely any pricier. | 9.7 | 8.7 | 1413 | 40.2 | - |
| **Jogger TCe 110 Comfort** | ★★★★⯪ | 20.4.22 | Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it. | 11.0 | 11.0 | 1267 | 48.5 | - |

### DS

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige** | ★★★☆☆ | 10.7.19 | No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish. | 8.8 | 8.3 | 1205 | 48.6 | - |
| **4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+** | ★★★⯪☆ | 29.6.22 | High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top. | 7.4 | 6.0 | 1706 | 44.7 | 26 |
| **7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige** | ★★★⯪☆ | 19.9.18 | DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class. | 8.6 | 7.0 | 1616 | 44.6 | - |
| **7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première** | ★★★⯪☆ | 26.4.23 | More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate. | 5.7 | 4.6 | 1956 | 36.6 | 29 |
| **9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus** | ★★★⯪☆ | 2.2.22 | Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper. | 8.6 | 7.1 | 1886 | 44.7 | 20 |

### FERRARI

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **296 GTB** | ★★★★★ | 21.12.22 | Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent. | 2.7 | 1.9 | 1648 | 37.8 | 15 |
| **SF90 Stradale** | ★★★★☆ | 3.11.21 | Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great. | 2.5 | 1.8 | 1698 | 24.4 | 16 |

### FIAT

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **500 Twinair Lounge** | ★★★⯪☆ | 24.11.10 | Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down. | 11.7 | 13.0 | 1070 | 42.1 | - |
| **500C 1.2 Pop** | ★★★★☆ | 5.8.09 | Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better. | 13.2 | 14.4 | 1035 | 48.3 | - |
| **500e 42kWh Icon** | ★★★★☆ | 26.1.22 | More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form. | 8.1 | 7.7 | 1365 | - | 142 |
| **600e La Prima** | ★★★⯪☆ | 27.3.24 | Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook. | 8.8 | 7.7 | 1587 | - | 173 |

### FORD

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium** | ★★★★⯪ | 9.8.17 | A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one. | 6.6 | 7.8 | 1218 | 48.2 | - |
| **Fiesta ST** | ★★★★⯪ | 15.8.18 | Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects. | 6.6 | 7.8 | 1218 | 48.2 | - |

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X** | ★★★★½ | 20.2.19 | Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value. | 8.9 | 7.8 | 1417 | 43.8 | - |
| **Focus ST** | ★★★★☆ | 11.9.19 | Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive. | 6.1 | 4.9 | 1433 | 40.7 | - |
| **Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium** | ★★★★½ | 25.3.20 | The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides. | 10.0 | 9.6 | 1260 | 50.0 | - |
| **Puma ST** | ★★★★☆ | 24.3.21 | Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well. | 7.2 | 6.2 | 1301 | 41.5 | - |
| **Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD** | ★★★½☆ | 23.10.24 | Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost. | 5.8 | 4.8 | 2067 | 2.9 | 262 |
| **Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line** | ★★★½☆ | 24.6.20 | Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give. | - | - | 1844 | - | - |
| **Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD** | ★★★★☆ | 23.6.21 | Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable. | 6.8 | 5.6 | 2130 | - | - |
| **Mustang Mach-E GT AWD** | ★★★☆☆ | 27.4.22 | Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford. | 4.2 | 3.5 | 2298 | - | - |
| **Mustang Dark Horse** | ★★★½☆ | 20.11.24 | Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears. | 4.5 | 3.5 | 1853 | 26.1 | - |
| **Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium** | ★★★½☆ | 10.7.24 | Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money. | 10.8 | 10.6 | 1426 | 47.4 | - |
| **Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited** | ★★★★☆ | 8.5.24 | Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price. | 12.1 | 11.8 | 1971 | 38.8 | - |
| **Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak** | ★★★★½ | 14.6.23 | Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault. | 9.8 | 9.9 | 2348 | 36.6 | - |
| **F-150 Lightning Platinum** | ★★★½☆ | 17.5.23 | Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off. | 4.5 | 3.7 | 3121 | - | 288 |

## GENESIS

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line** | ★★★½☆ | 10.11.21 | Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment. | 7.2 | 6.7 | 1751 | 60.4 | - |
| **Electrified G80** | ★★★½☆ | 12.10.22 | Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates. | 4.4 | 4.0 | 2349 | - | 272 |
| **GV60 Sport Plus** | ★★★★☆ | 24.8.22 | Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet. | 3.8 | 3.1 | 2192 | - | 220 |
| **GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater** | ★★★½☆ | 15.9.21 | Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet. | 6.7 | 6.6 | 2217 | 45.0 | - |

## GWM ORA

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition** | ★★½☆☆ | 1.2.23 | Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall. | 7.7 | 7.2 | 1580 | - | 154 |

## HONDA

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **E Advance** | ★★★½☆ | 26.8.20 | More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue. | 7.9 | - | 1535 | - | 110 |
| **Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX** | ★★★½☆ | 7.10.20 | Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive. | 9.6 | 10.0 | 1248 | 57.0 | - |
| **Civic Type R GT** | ★★★★½ | 25.10.17 | Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances. | 5.7 | 7.1 | 1400 | 57.0 | - |
| **HR-V e:HEV Advance Style** | ★★★½☆ | 24.11.21 | Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold. | 9.2 | 9.3 | 1397 | 43.2 | - |
| **e:Ny1 Advance** | ★★★☆☆ | 1.11.23 | EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price. | 8.6 | 6.9 | 1756 | - | 211 |

## HYUNDAI

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **i10 1.2 MPi Premium** | ★★★★☆ | 15.4.20 | Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class. | 12.3 | 12.9 | 999 | 52.5 | - |
| **i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect** | ★★★½☆ | 24.2.21 | Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality. | 9.7 | 10.1 | 1065 | 63.5 | - |
| **i20 N** | ★★★★½ | 25.8.21 | N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish. | 6.1 | 5.4 | 1231 | 50.6 | - |
| **i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE** | ★★★½☆ | 13.9.17 | Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike. | 9.5 | 9.7 | 1425 | 48.9 | - |
| **i30 N Performance** | ★★★½☆ | 28.12.17 | Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges. | 6.4 | 5.6 | 1478 | 43.1 | - |
| **Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate** | ★★★½☆ | 7.6.23 | Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride. | 7.2 | 6.2 | 2006 | - | 272 |
| **Kona 1.0 120PS Advance** | ★★★★☆ | 6.9.23 | Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class. | 10.4 | 10.3 | 1352 | 50.4 | - |
| **Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium** | ★★★★☆ | 17.3.21 | Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance. | 7.6 | 6.2 | 1612 | 47.7 | - |
| **Ioniq 5 N** | ★★★★★ | 7.8.24 | A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date. | 3.5 | 2.7 | 2221 | - | 224 |
| **Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium** | ★★★★☆ | 16.10.24 | A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain. | 7.9 | 7.5 | 2007 | 32.9 | - |
| **Nexo** | ★★★½☆ | 12.6.19 | Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars. | 9.6 | 9.7 | 1852 | - | - |

## INEOS

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster** | ★★★½☆ | 20.9.23 | Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation. | 8.0 | 8.1 | 2682 | 20.9 | - |

## JAECOO

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **7 SHS 2WD Luxury** | ★★½☆☆ | 9.4.25 | Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws. | 7.3 | 6.4 | 1814 | 35.0 | 41 |

## JAGUAR

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport** | ★★★★½ | 1.7.15 | Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game. | 7.6 | 6.7 | 1530 | 48.7 | - |
| **XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD** | ★★★½☆ | 17.4.19 | Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update. | 6.6 | 6.2 | 1727 | 36.8 | - |
| **E-Pace D180 AWD SE** | ★★★½☆ | 11.4.18 | Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless. | 9.9 | 10.5 | 1768 | 49.2 | - |
| **I-Pace EV400 S** | ★★★★½ | 12.9.18 | Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly. | 4.5 | 3.5 | 2236 | - | - |
| **F-Pace SVR** | ★★★★½ | 24.7.19 | Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots. | 4.1 | 3.5 | 2070 | 29.4 | - |
| **F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE** | ★★★★½ | 1.12.21 | Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success. | 5.1 | 4.6 | 2264 | - | 24 |
| **F-Type V8 S Convertible** | ★★★★☆ | 12.6.13 | As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost. | 4.0 | 3.4 | 1810 | 28.5 | - |
| **F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé** | ★★★★☆ | 29.4.20 | The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features. | - | - | 1743 | - | - |

## JEEP

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Avenger Electric Summit** | ★★★½☆ | 24.1.24 | Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction. | 8.3 | 6.9 | 1601 | - | 172 |
| **Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited** | ★★★½☆ | 3.10.18 | Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success. | 11.0 | 11.5 | 1540 | 44.8 | - |
| **Compass 4xe S** | ★★★☆☆ | 16.2.22 | Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects. | 6.4 | 5.7 | 1872 | 46.9 | 22 |
| **Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited** | ★★★½☆ | 28.10.15 | Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready. | 10.8 | 11.2 | 1502 | 52.6 | - |
| **Renegade 4xe Trailhawk** | ★★★☆☆ | 30.6.21 | Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready. | 6.7 | 5.6 | 1816 | 39.4 | 21 |
| **Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland** | ★★★★☆ | 10.4.19 | Off-road icon is now more competent on it. | 9.0 | 9.1 | 2122 | 37.6 | - |

## KGM

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tivoli XLV ELX Auto** | ★★★☆☆ | 14.9.16 | Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling. | 12.0 | 12.6 | 1469 | - | - |

## KIA

| | | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Picanto 1.0 MPI 2** | ★★★½☆ | 11.9.24 | No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here. | 13.4 | 13.9 | 985 | 51.4 | - |

TOP 3

## BEST SMALL ELECTRIC CARS

**1** Renault 5

**2** Mini Cooper E/SE

**3** MG 4 EV

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

# *Road tests revisited*

## 1969 ALFA ROMEO 1300 GT JUNIOR

Cheapest in the 105 series of Giulia-based coupés is visually and mechanically similar to the hot 1750 GT Veloce but has a smaller engine. Nevertheless, "it really does feel every bit the thoroughbred" in performance terms and handles wonderfully.

**Price** £1759
**Engine** 4 cyls in line, 1290cc, petrol
**Power** 103bhp at 6000rpm
**Torque** 101lb ft at 3200rpm
**Weight** 1015kg
**0-60mph** 13.2sec
**0-90mph** 36.3sec
**Top speed** 104mph
**Economy** 24.4mpg

## 1950 JAGUAR XK120

First sporting Jag since the war. "In trying to convey the supreme position it occupies, there is a temptation to draw from the motoring vocabulary every adjective in the superlative concerning performance, and to call upon the devices of italics and even the capital letter!"

**Price** £1263
**Engine** 6 cyls in line, 3442cc, petrol
**Power** 160bhp at 5100rpm
**Torque** 195lb ft at 2500rpm
**Weight** 1324kg
**0-60mph** 12.0sec
**0-90mph** 25.9sec
**Top speed** 115mph**
**Economy** 17mpg

**READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE***

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2** ★★★★☆ 29.8.18<br>Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia. | 9.9 | 9.6 | 1411 | 70.3 | - |
| **Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S** ★★★½☆ 27.2.19<br>Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks. | 9.5 | 8.9 | 1475 | 42.6 | - |
| **Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition** ★★★½☆ 20.11.19<br>Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish. | 9.3 | 8.7 | 1452 | 46.8 | - |
| **Soul EV Urban** ★★★½☆ 5.7.23<br>Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete. | 8.0 | 8.3 | 1569 | - | 147 |
| **Niro EV 3** ★★★★☆ 7.9.22<br>A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities. | 6.9 | 5.6 | 1739 | - | 246 |
| **EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line** ★★★★☆ 31.12.24<br>New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer. | 7.2 | 6.4 | 1858 | 2.6 | 265 |
| **Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S** ★★★½☆ 15.6.22<br>Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive. | 7.3 | 6.4 | 1658 | 44.8 | - |
| **EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S** ★★★★☆ 9.10.24<br>Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice. | 7.5 | 6.3 | – | 2.9 | 227 |
| **EV6 GT** ★★★½☆ 4.10.23<br>Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal. | 3.6 | 2.7 | 2161 | - | 209 |
| **Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2** ★★★½☆ 20.1.21<br>Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through. | 8.5 | 7.9 | 2006 | 43.3 | - |
| **EV9 GT-Line S** ★★★★☆ 31.1.24<br>Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals. | 5.1 | 4.6 | 2660 | - | 220 |

## LAMBORGHINI

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Huracán Performante** ★★★★½ 11.10.17<br>Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness. | 2.9 | 2.0 | 1590 | 22.4 | - |
| **Huracán Evo RWD** ★★★★½ 20.5.20<br>Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable. | - | - | 1389 | - | - |
| **Revuelto** ★★★★½ 4.12.24<br>New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent. | 2.5 | 1.7 | 1960 | 24.1 | 6 |
| **Urus** ★★★★☆ 3.7.19<br>Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind. | 3.3 | 2.8 | 2285 | 28.5 | - |

## LAND ROVER

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE** ★★★★½ 10.2.21<br>A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious. | 6.8 | 5.9 | 2158 | 32.7 | 24 |
| **Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE** ★★★★☆ 8.1.20<br>Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain. | 10.3 | 10.5 | 2145 | 47.5 | - |
| **Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury** ★★★★½ 12.4.17<br>A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever. | 8.7 | 8.8 | 2230 | - | - |
| **Range Rover Velar D240 HSE** ★★★½☆ 30.8.17<br>Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain. | 9.3 | 9.0 | 2089 | 48.2 | - |
| **Defender 110 P400 X** ★★★★½ 13.5.20<br>World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price. | - | - | 2388 | - | - |
| **Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE** ★★★★½ 2.11.22<br>Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match. | 7.2 | 6.6 | 2511 | 42.5 | - |
| **Range Rover Sport SV Edition One** ★★★½☆ 28.8.24<br>More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling. | 3.9 | 5.1 | 2546 | 28.9 | - |
| **Range Rover D350 HSE** ★★★★½ 13.7.22<br>A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4. | 6.3 | 6.0 | 2667 | 35.9 | - |
| **Range Rover P550e Autobiography** ★★★★☆ 9.4.25<br>A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form. | 4.9 | 4.0 | 2979 | 26.6 | 44 |

## LEXUS

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LBX FWD Premium Plus Design** ★★★½☆ 29.5.24<br>Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just. | 8.4 | 8.4 | 1306 | 45.2 | - |
| **NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack** ★★★★☆ 16.3.22<br>Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best. | 7.1 | 6.7 | 1812 | 44.7 | - |
| **RX 500h F Sport** ★★★½☆ 22.3.23<br>Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers. | 6.1 | 5.5 | 2088 | 31.7 | - |
| **ES 300h Takumi** ★★★½☆ 6.2.19<br>Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character. | 8.7 | 7.6 | 1742 | 48.8 | - |
| **LS 500h Premier** ★★★☆☆ 6.6.18<br>Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas. | 5.9 | 5.3 | 2404 | 42.2 | - |
| **RC F Ultimate Edition** ★★★½☆ 6.11.24<br>Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring. | 4.7 | 3.8 | 1733 | 30.1 | - |
| **LM 350h AWD Takumi** ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24<br>MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo. | 8.6 | 8.2 | 2368 | 40.5 | - |

## LOTUS

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Emira V6 First Edition** ★★★★½ 2.4.25<br>The British sports car is alive, well and expensive. | 4.4 | 4.0 | 1493 | 29.0 | – |
| **Eletre R** ★★★½☆ 24.7.24<br>There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus. | 3.1 | 2.2 | 2682 | - | 216 |

## MASERATI

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ghibli Diesel** ★★★½☆ 12.3.14<br>Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance. | 6.5 | 6.0 | 2040 | 40.4 | - |
| **Grecale Trofeo** ★★★½☆ 18.10.23<br>A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale. | 3.6 | 3.2 | 2097 | 33.6 | - |
| **Levante Diesel** ★★★☆☆ 30.11.16<br>A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling. | 6.8 | 6.9 | 2205 | 41.5 | - |
| **Levante S Granlusso** ★★★½☆ 8.5.19<br>Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it. | 5.1 | 4.5 | 2232 | 23.7 | - |
| **Granturismo Trofeo** ★★★½☆ 11.9.24<br>An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price. | 3.6 | 3.1 | - | 33.0 | - |
| **Granturismo Folgore** ★★★½☆ 26.2.25<br>Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8. | 2.9 | 2.3 | 2358 | 2.3 | 183 |
| **MC20 Cielo** ★★★★☆ 16.10.24<br>Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar. | 4.0 | 2.8 | 1783 | 29.6 | - |

## MAZDA

| | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav** ★★★★☆ 22.4.15<br>The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder. | 10.4 | 11.0 | 1050 | - | - |
| **3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport** ★★★★☆ 6.11.19<br>Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout. | 9.1 | 9.1 | 1425 | 57.0 | - |
| **MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech** ★★★½☆ 10.3.21<br>Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more. | 9.1 | 8.6 | 1663 | - | - |
| **CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line** ★★★★☆ 19.2.25<br>Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV. | 7.6 | 7.6 | 1422 | 45.2 | - |
| **CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav** ★★★★☆ 28.6.17<br>Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions. | 9.4 | 9.2 | 1620 | 53.9 | - |
| **CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line** ★★★½☆ 10.5.23<br>Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook. | 7.6 | 7.2 | 1893 | 52.3 | - |
| **MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav** ★★★★½ 2.9.15<br>An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price. | 8.4 | 7.9 | 1050 | - | - |

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*For three weeks from publication date **Maximum within distance available

### McLAREN

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **720S** ★★★★★ | 24.5.17 | Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast. | 2.9 | 2.0 | 1419 | 24.2 | - |
| **750S** ★★★★☆ | 19.6.24 | McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost. | 2.9 | 2.0 | 1412 | 28.8 | - |
| **Artura** ★★★★⯪ | 19.10.22 | Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification. | 3.2 | 2.1 | 1552 | 32.9 | 17 |
| **Artura Spider** ★★★★⯪ | 6.11.24 | Artura finds extra form in convertible guise. | 3.1 | 2.2 | 1618 | 27.2 | 17 |
| **GT** ★★★⯪☆ | 27.1.21 | Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement. | 3.3 | 2.3 | 1580 | 34.2 | |

### MERCEDES-AMG

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A45 S 4Matic+ Plus** ★★★★⯪ | 4.3.20 | AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability. | 4.1 | 3.3 | 1661 | 41.5 | - |
| **C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate** ★★★☆☆ | 31.7.24 | Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate. | 3.3 | 2.8 | 2217 | 27.1 | 7.1 |
| **GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé** ★★★★⯪ | 13.3.19 | AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully. | 3.3 | 2.7 | 2135 | 30.1 | - |
| **GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé** ★★★⯪☆ | 21.6.23 | Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward. | 2.9 | 2.5 | 2339 | 23.9 | 6 |
| **EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition** ★★★★☆ | 8.6.22 | Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential. | 3.6 | 2.8 | 2673 | - | 259 |
| **S63 E Performance Night Edition** ★★★★☆ | 2.10.24 | Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it. | 3.5 | 2.7 | 2666 | 26.1 | - |
| **GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus** ★★★⯪☆ | 14.10.20 | Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal. | 5.4 | 4.9 | 2471 | 29.4 | - |
| **SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus** ★★★⯪☆ | 26.7.23 | Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains. | 3.5 | 2.8 | 1939 | 26.2 | - |
| **GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé** ★★★⯪☆ | 14.8.24 | Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before. | 3.1 | 2.7 | 1972 | 30.7 | - |

### MERCEDES-BENZ

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A200 AMG Line Executive** ★★★★☆ | 24.5.23 | Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch. | 7.8 | 7.3 | 1396 | 59.3 | - |
| **A250e AMG Line Premium** ★★★☆☆ | 5.8.20 | Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience. | 6.7 | 5.4 | 1665 | 57.8 | - |
| **B180 Sport** ★★★★☆ | 3.4.19 | In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration. | 8.4 | 8.3 | 1405 | 51.3 | - |
| **CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★☆☆ | 21.8.19 | Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car. | 6.8 | 6.1 | 1555 | 48.3 | - |
| **C300e AMG Line** ★★★★⯪ | 4.5.22 | Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point. | 5.8 | 5.1 | 2005 | 49.0 | 48 |
| **E220d AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★★☆ | 3.1.24 | An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity. | 7.2 | 5.9 | 1917 | 65.8 | - |
| **E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus** ★★★★⯪ | 19.3.25 | Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need. | 4.9 | 4.3 | 2167 | 46.1 | - |
| **EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★⯪☆ | 4.1.23 | Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space. | 6.0 | 5.5 | 2386 | - | 262 |
| **EQS 450 Business Class SUV** ★★★⯪☆ | 6.3.24 | Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory. | 5.5 | 5.2 | 2899 | - | 265 |
| **S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive** ★★★★⯪ | 6.4.22 | Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation. | 5.2 | 4.2 | 2530 | 37.0 | 45 |
| **EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★☆☆ | 17.11.21 | Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better. | 8.4 | 7.6 | 2030 | - | 200 |
| **GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium** ★★★⯪☆ | 16.9.20 | Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times. | 7.4 | 7.1 | 1810 | 55.4 | - |
| **EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium** ★★★⯪☆ | 18.5.22 | A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium. | 7.7 | 6.8 | 2235 | - | - |
| **GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★⯪☆ | 13.9.23 | Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition. | 6.5 | 6.0 | 1929 | 41.2 | - |
| **GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium** ★★★⯪☆ | 12.2.20 | Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs. | 6.5 | 6.0 | 2634 | 38.2 | - |
| **G350d AMG Line** ★★★★☆ | 17.7.19 | Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury. | 7.5 | 7.2 | 2451 | 31.3 | - |
| **G500 AMG Line Premium Plus** ★★★★☆ | 25.9.24 | Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love. | 5.1 | 4.5 | – | 30.7 | - |
| **CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé** ★★★★☆ | 13.11.24 | Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé. | 6.1 | 5.5 | 2122 | 37.1 | 49 |

### MG

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3 Hybrid+ Trophy** ★★★⯪☆ | 12.6.24 | Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish. | 6.8 | 6.2 | 1311 | 47.9 | - |
| **4 EV Long Range SE** ★★★★☆ | 5.4.23 | Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot. | 7.1 | 6.1 | 1692 | - | 185 |
| **5 SW EV Exclusive** ★★★⯪☆ | 25.11.20 | MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first. | 8.0 | 7.1 | 1538 | - | 161 |
| **ZS EV Exclusive** ★★★☆☆ | 4.12.19 | Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on. | 8.9 | 8.0 | 1556 | - | 113 |
| **ZS Hybrid+ Trophy** ★★★☆☆ | 22.1.25 | Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money. | 7.6 | 6.6 | 1422 | 41.5 | – |

### MINI

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Countryman C Exclusive** ★★★⯪☆ | 17.4.24 | Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement. | 8.7 | 7.7 | 1618 | 46.9 | - |
| **Aceman SE Exclusive** ★★★⯪☆ | 8.1.25 | Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal. | 6.8 | 5.7 | 1756 | 3.1 | 162 |

### MORGAN

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Plus Four** ★★★⯪☆ | 12.8.20 | Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish. | 5.1 | 4.3 | 1013 | 54.0 | - |
| **Plus Six** ★★★★☆ | 10.4.24 | The individualist's sports car made better. | 4.4 | 3.3 | 1188 | 37.2 | - |
| **Super 3** ★★★★⯪ | 9.11.22 | Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles. | 6.9 | 5.9 | 644 | 43.5 | - |

### NISSAN

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna** ★★★⯪☆ | 29.1.20 | Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few. | 11.9 | 11.8 | 1256 | 46.0 | - |
| **Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna** ★★★★☆ | 28.7.21 | Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates. | 10.0 | 9.3 | 1412 | 44.9 | - |
| **Ariya 87kWh Evolve** ★★★⯪☆ | 26.10.22 | Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful. | 8.2 | 6.4 | 2109 | - | - |
| **X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna** ★★★★☆ | 22.2.23 | Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life. | 6.6 | 6.0 | 1947 | 33.8 | - |

### OMODA

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5 1.6 TGDI Comfort** ★★⯪☆☆ | 20.11.24 | Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed. | 7.4 | 6.3 | 1474 | 38.2 | - |

### PEUGEOT

| | | | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **e-208 Allure Premium** ★★★★☆ | 6.5.20 | Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV | - | - | 1455 | 38.2 | - |
| **308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT** ★★★★☆ | 25.5.22 | A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special. | 9.5 | 9.2 | 1358 | 55.3 | - |
| **408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8** ★★★★☆ | 11.10.23 | Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car. | 8.2 | 7.3 | 1746 | 42.1 | 40 |
| **508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto** ★★★★☆ | 24.10.18 | Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals. | 8.8 | 8.5 | 1671 | 52.0 | - |
| **508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8** ★★★★☆ | 8.7.20 | This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy. | - | - | 1720 | - | - |
| **508 SW Hybrid4 PSE** ★★★★☆ | 5.5.21 | Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere. | 5.7 | 4.7 | 1892 | 44.0 | - |

**TOP 3**

## FASTEST ROAD-LEGAL CARS

**1** Koenigsegg Jesko Absolut

**2** Bugatti Chiron Super Sport

**3** SSC Tuatara

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **e-2008 GT Line** | ★★★⯪☆ | 30.9.20 | Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders. | 9.5 | 8.9 | 1638 | - | - |
| **3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line** | ★★★⯪☆ | 18.1.17 | In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers. | 12.0 | 12.1 | 1300 | 53.2 | - |
| **e-3008 73kWh Allure** | ★★★⯪☆ | 4.8.24 | Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force. | 8.5 | 7.1 | 2132 | - | 219 |
| **5008 Hybrid 136 GT** | ★★★☆☆ | 12.2.25 | Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering. | 9.9 | 9.4 | 1736 | 44.0 | - |

## POLESTAR

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2 BST Edition 270** | ★★★⯪☆ | 12.4.23 | A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed. | 4.5 | 3.4 | 2161 | - | 188 |
| **3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition** | ★★★★☆ | 12.2.25 | Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses. | 4.6 | 3.8 | 2610 | 2.3 | 235 |

## PORSCHE

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **718 Boxster** | ★★★★⯪ | 8.6.16 | Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal. | 5.4 | 4.3 | 1395 | 35.9 | - |
| **718 Cayman S** | ★★★★⯪ | 10.8.16 | Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it. | 4.8 | 3.9 | 1430 | - | - |
| **718 Spyder** | ★★★★⯪ | 1.4.20 | Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings. | 4.3 | 3.5 | 1350 | 30.1 | - |
| **718 Cayman GT4 RS** | ★★★★★ | 14.9.22 | A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special. | 3.9 | 3.0 | 1444 | 27.1 | - |
| **911 GT3 PDK** | ★★★★⯪ | 11.8.21 | Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good. | 3.4 | 2.7 | 1430 | 29.2 | - |
| **911 Turbo S** | ★★★★⯪ | 10.8.22 | Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable. | 2.5 | 2.0 | 1640 | 36.3 | - |
| **911 Carrera T** | ★★★★☆ | 30.8.23 | Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises. | 4.9 | 3.8 | 1456 | 39.1 | - |
| **911 GT3 RS** | ★★★★⯪ | 22.11.23 | Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental. | 3.2 | 2.5 | 1476 | 26.7 | - |
| **911 Dakar** | ★★★★☆ | 10.1.24 | Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911. | 3.3 | 2.6 | 1660 | 36.0 | - |
| **911 S/T** | ★★★★★ | 3.7.24 | Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great. | 3.7 | 2.6 | 1408 | 30.9 | - |
| **911 Carrera GTS** | ★★★★⯪ | 5.3.25 | Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere. | 2.8 | 2.6 | 1607 | 34.3 | - |
| **Macan Turbo** | ★★★★⯪ | 4.6.14 | Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package. | 4.7 | 4.3 | 2050 | 30.9 | - |
| **Macan Turbo Electric** | ★★★⯪☆ | 19.2.25 | Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech. | 3.0 | 2.5 | – | 2.1 | 219 |
| **Cayenne S** | ★★★★⯪ | 21.2.24 | Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick. | 5.0 | 4.3 | 2256 | 28.8 | - |
| **Cayenne Turbo** | ★★★★☆ | 5.9.18 | As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was. | 3.9 | 3.4 | 2307 | 31.5 | - |
| **Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid** | ★★★⯪☆ | 27.5.20 | Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself. | - | - | 2490 | - | - |
| **Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé** | ★★★★☆ | 20.7.22 | Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one. | 3.1 | 2.7 | 2251 | 26.1 | - |
| **Panamera 4 E-Hybrid** | ★★★★☆ | 22.1.25 | Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon. | 3.8 | 2.4 | 2370 | 30.1 | 29 |
| **Taycan Turbo S** | ★★★★⯪ | 30.10.24 | Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil. | 2.6 | 1.9 | 2356 | 2.7 | 233 |

TOP 3

## BEST PORSCHES ON SALE TODAY

**1** Porsche 718 Spyder RS

**2** Porsche 911 Carrera T

**3** Porsche Cayenne S

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

## RENAULT

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Clio TCe 100 Iconic** | ★★★★⯪ | 27.11.19 | Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style. | 11.6 | 10.9 | 1138 | 56.9 | - |
| **5** | ★★★★⯪ | 12.3.25 | Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game. | 7.7 | 7.2 | 1461 | 3.1 | 166 |
| **Megane E-Tech Techno** | ★★★⯪☆ | 23.11.22 | Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on. | 6.9 | 5.4 | 1688 | - | 198 |
| **Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC** | ★★★⯪☆ | 18.3.20 | Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain. | 9.4 | 9.2 | 1363 | 53.1 | - |
| **Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition** | ★★★⯪☆ | 13.10.21 | Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car. | 11.0 | 10.1 | 1365 | 58.3 | - |
| **Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range** | ★★★★☆ | 26.6.24 | The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance. | 8.1 | 6.3 | 1916 | - | 313 |
| **Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine** | ★★★⯪☆ | 19.7.23 | Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics. | 8.5 | 6.9 | 1696 | 43.5 | - |

## ROLLS-ROYCE

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ghost** | ★★★★⯪ | 13.1.21 | Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo. | 4.7 | 3.8 | 2490 | 28.5 | - |
| **Phantom** | ★★★★★ | 4.4.18 | The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best. | 5.5 | 4.4 | 2780 | 28.4 | - |
| **Spectre** | ★★★★⯪ | 20.12.23 | Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making. | 4.1 | 3.1 | 2935 | - | 245 |
| **Cullinan Black Badge** | ★★★★☆ | 19.2.20 | Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it. | 4.9 | 4.2 | 2739 | 23.6 | - |

## SEAT

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology** | ★★★★⯪ | 19.7.17 | Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects. | 10.0 | 10.0 | 1047 | 55.6 | - |
| **Leon eHybrid FR** | ★★★⯪☆ | 2.12.20 | Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive. | 7.2 | 6.2 | 1558 | 46.3 | 26 |
| **Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology** | ★★★★☆ | 15.11.17 | Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown. | 10.5 | 10.7 | 1149 | 40.9 | - |
| **Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG** | ★★★☆☆ | 25.10.23 | Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect. | 8.9 | 8.0 | 1396 | 44.4 | - |

## SKODA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort** | ★★★★⯪ | 9.2.22 | Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best. | 9.9 | 9.7 | 1117 | 58.7 | - |
| **Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG** | ★★★⯪☆ | 31.7.19 | Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough. | 7.9 | 7.3 | 1200 | 52.9 | - |
| **Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG** | ★★★★☆ | 2.9.20 | Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds. | 8.4 | 8.7 | 1510 | 73.0 | - |
| **Octavia Estate vRS** | ★★★★☆ | 29.1.25 | A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger. | 5.9 | 4.8 | – | 37.6 | - |
| **Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate** | ★★★★★ | 17.7.24 | The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways. | 8.4 | 8.2 | 1673 | 68.7 | - |
| **Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout** | ★★★⯪☆ | 30.1.19 | Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish. | 8.9 | 9.6 | 1629 | 47.1 | - |
| **Elroq 85 Edition** | ★★★★⯪ | 19.3.25 | Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV. | 6.1 | 5.0 | 2085 | 3.5 | 246 |
| **Enyaq iV 80 Lounge** | ★★★★☆ | 18.8.21 | Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market. | 8.3 | 7.8 | 2098 | - | 262 |

## SMART

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **#1 Premium** | ★★★⯪☆ | 8.11.23 | Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience. | 5.6 | 4.6 | 1861 | - | 229 |
| **#3 Premium** | ★★★⯪☆ | 15.5.24 | Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details. | 5.7 | 4.9 | 1832 | - | 205 |

## SUBARU

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring** | ★★★⯪☆ | 28.2.24 | Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative. | 10.4 | 10.4 | 1620 | 45.3 | - |
| **Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring** | ★★★⯪☆ | 27.9.23 | A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked. | 9.3 | 8.7 | 1690 | 42.8 | - |
| **Solterra AWD Touring** | ★★★☆☆ | 15.3.23 | A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough. | 6.7 | 6.2 | 2051 | - | 169 |

## SUZUKI

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Vitara 1.6 SZ5** | ★★★⯪☆ | 29.4.15 | The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us. | 9.5 | 9.5 | 1124 | - | - |
| **SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4** | ★★★⯪☆ | 30.10.13 | Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony. | 10.0 | 10.1 | 1305 | 67.5 | - |

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT** | ★★★★½ | 7.4.21 | Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around. | 6.4 | 5.8 | 1966 | 44.4 | 48 |

### TESLA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model 3 Standard Range Plus** | ★★★★☆ | 4.9.19 | Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price. | 5.8 | 4.7 | 1633 | - | 156 |
| **Model 3 Long Range** | ★★★★☆ | 14.2.24 | Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions. | 4.4 | 3.4 | 1846 | - | 277 |
| **Model Y Long Range AWD** | ★★★★☆ | 23.3.22 | A far better electric car than a premium SUV. | 4.7 | 3.6 | 1978 | - | 234 |
| **Model S P90D** | ★★★★½ | 20.4.16 | Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT. | 3.5 | 3.0 | 2220 | - | 214 |
| **Model S Plaid** | ★★★½☆ | 2.8.23 | Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon. | 2.4 | 1.7 | 2220 | - | 301 |
| **Model X 90D** | ★★★★☆ | 15.2.17 | High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker. | 5.2 | 4.2 | 2508 | - | 147 |

### TOYOTA

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Aygo X Limited Edition** | ★★★½☆ | 11.5.22 | A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one. | 15.6 | 16.5 | 974 | 58.7 | - |
| **Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design** | ★★★★☆ | 23.9.20 | Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal. | 9.2 | 8.8 | 1140 | 65.0 | - |
| **GR Yaris Circuit Pack** | ★★★★★ | 3.3.21 | Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner. | 5.2 | 5.0 | 1283 | 39.2 | - |
| **Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports** | ★★★★☆ | 5.6.19 | A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot. | 8.5 | 7.7 | 1537 | 52.6 | - |
| **bZ4X AWD Vision** | ★★★½☆ | 18.1.23 | A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way. | 6.4 | 5.9 | 2023 | - | 208 |
| **Mirai Design Premium** | ★★★★☆ | 16.6.21 | Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall. | 8.7 | 8.3 | 1937 | - | - |
| **GR Supra Pro** | ★★★★☆ | 14.8.19 | Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more. | 4.4 | 3.6 | 1495 | 39.0 | - |
| **Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport** | ★★★½☆ | 1.3.23 | Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor. | 10.0 | 9.5 | 2241 | 32.5 | - |

### VAUXHALL

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto** | ★★★½☆ | 22.1.20 | Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price. | 11.2 | 11.5 | 1171 | 51.8 | - |
| **Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line** | ★★★½☆ | 5.10.22 | Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success. | 9.9 | 9.2 | 1304 | 55.3 | - |
| **Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite** | ★★★☆☆ | 7.6.17 | Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better. | 9.8 | 10.3 | 1278 | 54.2 | - |
| **Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto** | ★★★½☆ | 12.5.21 | The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short. | 9.3 | 9.1 | 1238 | 48.6 | - |
| **Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav** | ★★★☆☆ | 22.4.20 | Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option. | - | - | 1800 | - | - |
| **Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy** | ★★★½☆ | 27.12.18 | Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at. | 14.7 | 16.2 | 1552 | 60.1 | - |

### VOLKSWAGEN

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE** | ★★★★½ | 31.1.18 | Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before. | 10.7 | 11.2 | 1145 | 57.1 | - |
| **Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+** | ★★★★☆ | 1.8.18 | A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling. | 6.7 | 5.9 | 1342 | 46.8 | - |
| **Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG** | ★★★★½ | 22.7.20 | Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead. | 8.3 | 7.8 | 1330 | 60.0 | - |
| **Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style** | ★★★★½ | 23.10.24 | New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights. | 7.2 | 6.1 | 1619 | 46.5 | - |
| **Golf GTI** | ★★★½☆ | 25.9.24 | 'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward. | 5.3 | 4.4 | - | 47.2 | - |
| **Golf R** | ★★★★☆ | 14.4.21 | Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price. | 4.4 | 3.7 | 1520 | 43.9 | - |
| **ID 3 Pro Performance Life** | ★★★★☆ | 31.3.21 | Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push. | 7.0 | 6.5 | 1757 | - | 145 |
| **Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line** | ★★★½☆ | 27.9.17 | Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle. | 6.5 | 6.2 | 1866 | 55.6 | - |
| **Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake** | ★★★½☆ | 9.6.21 | Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart. | 7.1 | 6.0 | 1783 | 52.5 | - |
| **ID 7 Pro Match** | ★★★★½ | 13.3.24 | Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format. | 6.1 | 5.1 | 2162 | - | 239 |
| **T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG** | ★★★★½ | 24.1.18 | Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger. | 6.7 | 6.5 | 1534 | 37.5 | - |
| **T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG** | ★★½☆☆ | 10.6.20 | It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche. | - | - | 1540 | - | - |
| **Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line** | ★★★½☆ | 22.5.24 | Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for. | 9.4 | 9.2 | 1606 | 44.9 | - |
| **ID 4 GTX Max** | ★★★½☆ | 27.10.21 | GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age. | 6.2 | 5.6 | 2220 | - | 200 |
| **Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech** | ★★★½☆ | 8.8.18 | An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough. | 7.2 | 6.6 | 2292 | 41.6 | - |
| **Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance** | ★★★½☆ | 5.6.24 | It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice. | 6.2 | 5.7 | 2446 | 34.1 | 26 |
| **Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG** | ★★★★☆ | 3.2.16 | A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one. | 9.9 | 9.7 | 1666 | - | - |
| **Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style** | ★★★★☆ | 8.3.23 | Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van. | 8.4 | 7.1 | 2243 | 37.9 | 14 |
| **ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro** | ★★★★☆ | 8.2.23 | It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments. | 9.5 | 9.1 | 2498 | - | 185 |
| **Grand California 600** | ★★★½☆ | 2.1.20 | Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake. | 15.8 | 16.7 | 3095 | 28.5 | - |
| **Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB** | ★★★☆☆ | 30.3.22 | Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda. | 9.1 | 9.0 | 2108 | 39.1 | - |
| **Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance** | ★★★★☆ | 13.11.24 | Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car. | 7.2 | 6.4 | 1836 | 44.5 | 73 |

### VOLVO

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus** | ★★★☆☆ | 1.5.24 | Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism. | 5.7 | 5.1 | 1779 | - | 179 |
| **C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate** | ★★★½☆ | 13.4.22 | A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough. | 4.4 | 3.6 | 2172 | - | 194 |
| **XC40 D4 AWD First Edition** | ★★★★½ | 7.2.18 | Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better. | 8.5 | 8.5 | 1735 | 43.8 | - |
| **XC60 D4 AWD R-Design** | ★★★½☆ | 5.7.17 | The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish. | 8.9 | 8.9 | 1836 | 48.9 | - |
| **XC90 D5 AWD Momentum** | ★★★★☆ | 17.6.15 | A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal. | 8.3 | 8.3 | 2076 | - | - |
| **V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto** | ★★★★☆ | 27.6.18 | Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits. | 8.9 | 8.3 | 1669 | 43.1 | - |
| **V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design** | ★★★★½ | 21.9.22 | Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal. | 4.9 | 4.3 | 2036 | 38.0 | 51 |
| **V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design** | ★★★★½ | 11.11.20 | Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless. | 5.6 | 4.9 | 2109 | 41.9 | - |

### XPENG

| Model | Rating | Date | Verdict | 0-60mph | 30-70mph | Kerb weight | Touring economy | Electric range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **G6 RWD Standard Range** | ★★★½☆ | 26.2.25 | Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal. | 6.8 | 6.2 | 2067 | 3.3 | 208 |

## WHAT'S COMING WHEN

**BMW Skytop** August
Gorgeous cabrio has a 626bhp V8 – but just 50 will be made.

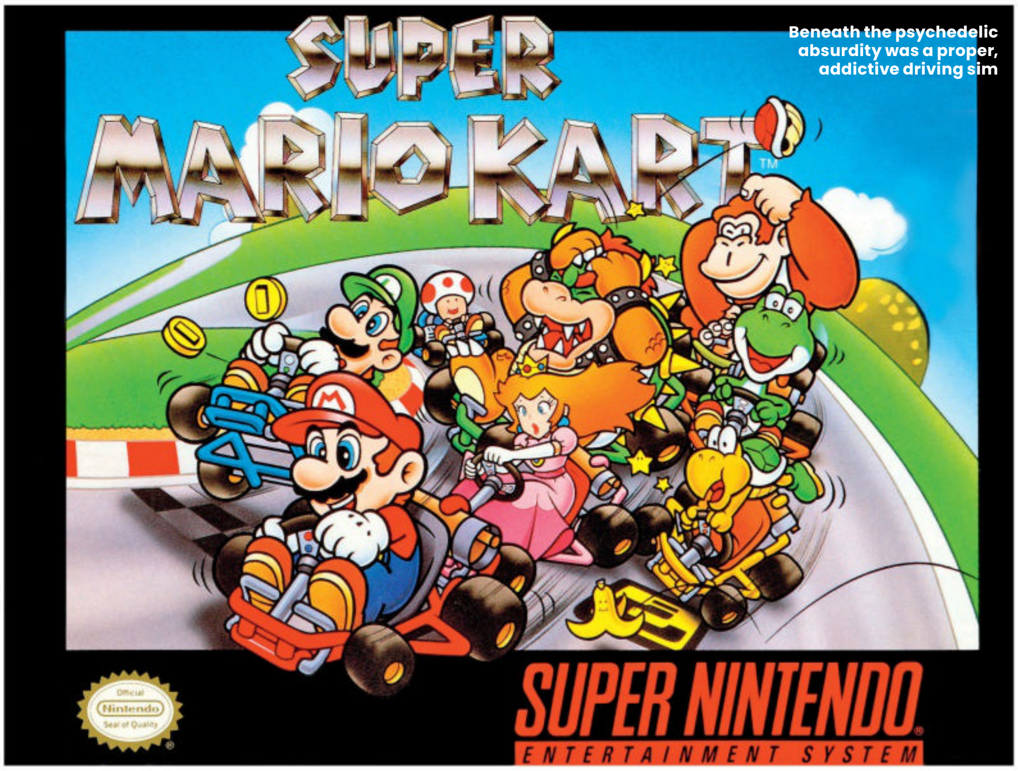
**Jeep Wagoneer S** November
New luxury SUV tops Jeep's line-up as a 592bhp EV with a 3.2sec 0-62mph time.

**KGM Musso EV** December
Dual-motor pick-up with 300-mile range, big performance.

**SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST**

# *Why I love…*
# SUPER MARIO KART

**BY JAMES ATTWOOD**


SUPER MARIO KART™
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Beneath the psychedelic absurdity was a proper, addictive driving sim

As computers and games consoles rapidly evolved in the 1990s from literally BASIC (as in the BBC Micro's programming language) to the ultra-cool Sony PlayStation, so developers created some amazing racing games.

In 1991, Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix set new standards for an accurate Formula 1 simulator, then in 1997 Gran Turismo's staggering realism and unprecedented scale changed the genre forever. TOCA Touring Car Championship and Colin McRae Rally melded simulation with accessible dynamics and there were pure arcade classics such as Sega Rally Challenge, Daytona USA, Ridge Racer and Need for Speed.

But the greatest racing game of the decade – no, actually, the greatest racing game of all time – arrived on the Super Nintendo in 1992, featuring a cartoon plumber racing karts against rivals including a gorilla, a princess and a mushroom. But underneath that cutesy cartoon froth, Super Mario Kart was a supreme racing title.

Clearly, Super Mario Kart isn't realistic in the style of Gran Turismo, but its faux-3D backdrops (enabled by the Super Nintendo's parallax scrolling and Mode 7 graphics wizardry) were groundbreaking. Even the technical limitations, such as the inability of the system to render 3D elevation, meant the track design had a simple purity that fancier, more capable games have since lost.

But it was in gameplay where Mario Kart excelled. The cartoon karts actually handled like karts. You had to hustle them, and unlocking true speed meant mastering the 'jump drift' technique to powerslide round corners. As a result, even Time Trial mode became a huge challenge. I maintain that my still-standing Attwood family lap record on Ghost Valley 1 is the nearest I'll ever come to Ayrton Senna's 1988 Monaco pole lap for in-the-zone driving transcendence.

So fun was the gameplay that kids young and old still love it today

> **"It's the nearest I'll come to Senna's 1988 Monaco pole lap"**

And the racing modes were another area where Super Mario Kart absolutely shone. For starters, the various characters had different characteristics (Bowser had a high top speed but handled badly and was slow to accelerate; Koopa Troopa would zip off the line and round corners but lagged on long straights) that created a real balance.

Then there were the power-ups: the green and red shells, mushrooms, bananas and stars. Forget Balance of Performance or success ballast, this was the ultimate way to level the field: the lower down the order you were, the better power-ups you got. Many times I would dominate a race, only for my brother to time a red shell strike to perfection and sweep past on the run to the line. Insanely frustrating and unfair, yet somehow we kept coming back for more.

There have been numerous Mario Kart titles on various Nintendo consoles (and now even mobile) since, but none has matched the simplicity and purity of the original. Nor has any other racing game. And more than 30 years on, Super Mario Kart is still as enjoyable to play as it ever was. Anyone up for a showdown on Rainbow Road?

## *What we did this week*

### BIG FAN OF THE 90s

I heard a machine roaring into life in the distance and, being on an airfield, assumed it was a biplane or helicopter of some sort – but it was actually the cooling fan for the Lamborghini Diablo that stars in this week's 1990s mega-test. An unignorable presence even when the shouty V12 is silent.
**JONATHAN BRYCE**

### BELOW PAR

At the Audi A6 launch, we were ferried between the different buildings of the sprawling hotel in these golf caddies. You can read my thoughts on the A6 on p22, and here's my buggy road test: good rear leg room but appalling ride isolation – small wonder, with a beam front axle – and not much sense of rear-drive dynamism either. Three stars.
**ILLYA VERPRAET**

### A VICIOUS CYCLE

Brussels Midi train station has this interesting and eco-friendly option for charging your devices on the go, which made me wonder if you could top up an EV the same way. Disappointingly, some calculations I found online suggest you'd have to pedal constantly (and frantically) for a whole week to charge a Tesla. For now I'll stick with the wallbox.
**WILL RIMELL**

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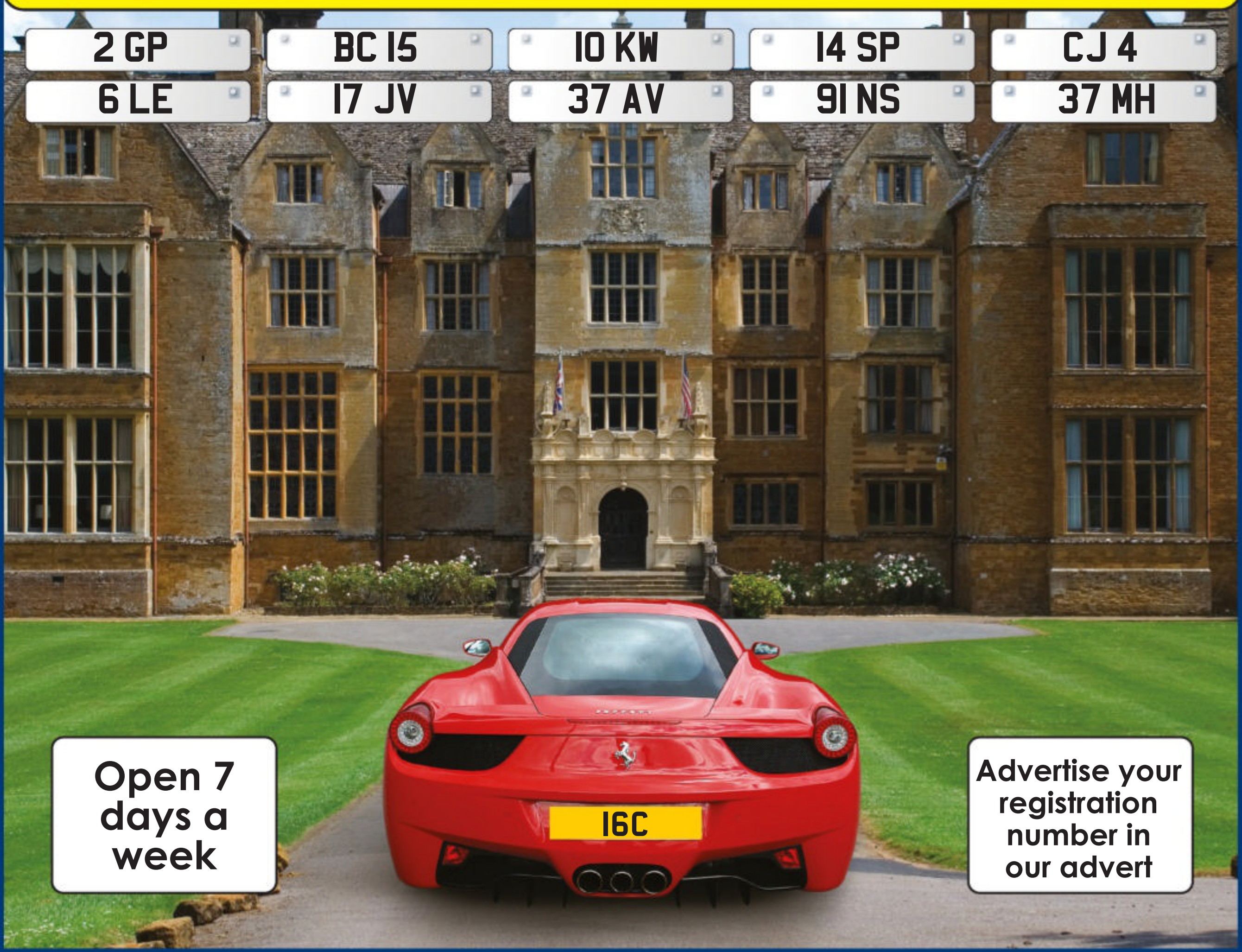
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